THE Hudson REVIEW

ROGER SALE:
The Achievement of William Empson

CYNTHIA OZICK:
The Pagan Rabbi—a story

ANTHONY BURGESS:
Letter from England

CALVIN BEDIENT:
The Radicalism of Lady Chatterley's Lover

JOHN SIMON:
Norman Brown's Body

Poems by JAMES DICKEY, LINCOLN KIRSTEIN, D. J. ENRIGHT, JOHN HOLLOWAY, LANE DUNLOP.

Articles and Reviews by SEYMOUR RUDIN, MARIUS BEWLEY, B. H. HAGGIN, DENIS DONOGHUE, J. MITCHELL MORSE, PATRICK CRUTTWELL, VICTOR BROMBERT, GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

VOLUME XIX, NUMBER 3 • AUTUMN 1966 • $1.50 PER COPY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DOUBLEDAY ANCHOR BOOKS

THE FIRST NAME IN QUALITY PAPERBACK PUBLISHING

COLLECTED POEMS
Robert Graves

"A man of passion, alive in an age gone formal and cold," says William Stafford of Robert Graves. There are 296 poems in this, the fifth collection of Robert Graves' verse selected by himself. *An Anchor Original.* $1.75

THE ILIAD, THE ODYSSEY, AND THE EPIC TRADITION
Charles Rowan Beye

The insights of modern Homeric scholarship are applied to such questions as: How were these epics written? What does archaeology tell us about the art of warfare in *The Iliad?* How does the process by which these epics came into being contradict our modern penchant for originality? *An Anchor Original.* $1.25

THE COMPLETE POEMS AND SELECTED LETTERS AND PROSE OF HART CRANE
Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Brom Weber

The most complete and authoritative collection of the works of Hart Crane ever published in paperback. The volume includes his three major collections of poetry *(White Buildings, The Bridge,* and *Key West);* a number of his uncollected poems; and selections from personal letters and literary essays. The book is fully annotated, with variant lines from manuscripts and periodical printings of all the poems. $1.45

THE POSITIVE THINKERS
Donald Meyer

A study of the American quest for health, wealth and personal power from Mary Baker Eddy to Norman Vincent Peale. "A conscientious piece of social history . . . a sane and readable account of a slightly hysterical subject." — *Harper's.* $1.45

THE IDENTITY OF MAN
J. Bronowski

The first new book in a decade by the author of *Science and Human Values,* THE IDENTITY OF MAN probes the crisis of self-confidence that springs from each man's wish to be a person, in the face of the nagging fear that, as science seems to show, he is a machine. Reviewing recent discoveries in physics and biology, Dr. Bronowski has articulated a humanistic philosophy for man today. *An American Museum Science Book.* 95¢

DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC.
Garden City, New York
Our Laidlaw division, River Forest, Illinois, serves the textbook needs of today's schools.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

J.M.G. Le Clézio

FEVER. Stories by the extraordinary young author of *The Interrogation,* of which Stanley Kauffmann said ". . . a gift of vision and an imagination that flies at the touch of a certain light, a view, a voice." $4.95

Peter Weiss

THE INVESTIGATION. A new play by the author of *Marat/Sade.* "The 1960's have seen the center of world theatre move back where it has not been since the 20's — Germany. Among the group of playwrights responsible for this change, none is more notable than Peter Weiss."—ERIC BENTLEY
$5.00 cloth; $2.45 paper

Robert Watson

ADVANTAGES OF DARK. A new book of poems by the author of *A Paper Horse,* of which May Swenson, in *Poetry,* said ". . . there are enough major poems, and in an individual voice, to make this first volume an achievement." $4.50 cloth; $1.95 paper

Peter Davison

THE CITY AND THE ISLAND. A new book of poems by the author of *The Breaking of the Day.* Dudley Fitts selected Peter Davison's first book of poems as the 1964 volume in the Yale Series of Younger Poets. $4.50 cloth; $1.95 paper

Peter Feibleman

STRANGERS AND GRAVES. Four short novels. "Mr. Feibleman's tales are not limited to mere sensibility. They have a social edge; they deal with sometimes horrifying scenes of human and social degradation."—MAXWELL GEISMAR. $5.95

Edward Albee

A DELICATE BALANCE. A play by the author of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* His first new original play since *Tiny Alice.* $5.00

E.D.H. Johnson

THE POETRY OF EARTH. A collection of English Nature Writings from Gilbert White of Selborne to Richard Jeffries, illustrated by their contemporaries. "Pre-eminently it belongs on the shelves of naturalists, poets, and connoisseurs of the impromptu and unusual."—LOREN EISELEY. $10.00

Now at your bookstore
ATHENEUM
162 East 38 Street, New York City 10016

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editor-in-Chief:

FREDERICK MORGAN

Editorial Board:

JOSEPH BENNETT
MARY EMMA ELLIOTT
ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS
MARIUS BEWLEY
ANTHONY HECHT
EDMUND T. DELANEY

Managing Editor:

IRENE SKOLNICK

Editorial Assistant:

CHARLOTTE WIGGERS

Contributing Editors:

B. H. HAGGIN, *Music and Ballet*
JOHN SIMON, *Theatre*
VERNON YOUNG, *Film*

THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 65 East 55th Street, New York, N. Y. 10022. It is a member of The Council of Literary Magazines and is indexed in The International Index.

Subscription $5.00 per year in U. S.; foreign including Canada $5.50. Single copy $1.50. U. S. distributor: B. De Boer, 188 High Street, Nutley, N. J. 07110. Subscriptions in England: B. H. Blackwell, Ltd., The Broad Street, Oxford. Back issues and reprints of Volumes I—XVI available from AMS Press, Inc., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003.

Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury. Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the editors.

Printed in the United States of America. Printing office: 2901 Byrdhill Road, Richmond, Virginia 23205. Second Class postage paid at Richmond, Virginia.

Registered U. S. Patent Office.

Copyright © 1966 by The Hudson Review, Inc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VOLUME XIX
NUMBER 3
AUTUMN 1966

THE Hudson Review

CONTENTS

Turning Away (*poem*)	JAMES DICKEY	361
The Achievement of William Empson	ROGER SALE	369
Three Poems	LINCOLN KIRSTEIN	391
Santana; Owls; Tarpon (*poems*)	LAURENCE LIEBERMAN	397
Three Poems	SAMUEL L. ALBERT	402
Translations from Montale	D. M. PETTINELLA	404
The Radicalism of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*	CALVIN BEDIENT	407
Rain-Giant; Flagstones (*poems*)	JOHN HOLLOWAY	417
Two Poems	D. J. ENRIGHT	419
The Snow of Lebanon (*poems*)	LANE DUNLOP	421
The Pagan Rabbi (*story*)	CYNTHIA OZICK	425
Letter from England	ANTHONY BURGESS	455
Music and Ballet Chronicle	B. H. HAGGIN	461
The Criticism of B. H. Haggin	SEYMOUR RUDIN	470

Reviews

Poetry Chronicle	MARIUS BEWLEY	479
Perse's Avian Order	VICTOR BROMBERT	494
New Miltonics	PATRICK CRUTTWELL	498
Sea of Troubles	DENIS DONOGHUE	503
Fiction Chronicle	J. MITCHELL MORSE	507
A Great Provincial	GEORGE P. ELLIOTT	515
A Hand at Shaw's Curtain	GERALD WEALES	518
Norman Brown's Body	JOHN SIMON	523
Notes on Contributors		469

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW DIRECTIONS BOOKS

The William Carlos Williams Reader

A selection of poetry, stories and essays, with excerpts from the novels, and a number of important texts which have long been out of print. Edited, with an introduction, by M. L. Rosenthal. $7.50

Blaise Cendrars / Selected Writings

A representative selection of the prose and poetry of one of the most remarkable French writers of this century. Edited by Walter Albert, with a foreword by Henry Miller. (Poetry bilingual) *Hardbound,* $5.95; *Paperback,* $2.25

Eugenio Montale / Selected Poems

"The most profound Italian poet of the 20th Century."—*Time* "Some of the most poignant poetry written in modern times."—*Book Week* English and Italian texts *en face.* Introduction by Glauco Cambon. *Hardbound,* $5.00; *Paperback,* $1.75

Lincoln Kirstein / Rhymes & More Rhymes of a PFC

"As a picture of World War II, *Rhymes of a PFC* is by far the most convincing, moving and impressive book I have come across."—*W. H. Auden.* An expanded edition. *Hardbound,* $5.00; *Paperback,* $2.35

Richard Eberhart / Selected Poems

The poet's choice from all his earlier volumes (1930-1964) and a group of new poems. Pulitzer Prize for Poetry 1966. *Paperback,* $1.75

Kenneth Patchen / Doubleheader

A combined edition of the earlier books *Poemscapes* and *Hurrah for Anything* (with illustrations by the author) and *A Letter to God. Paperback,* $1.35

Thomas Merton / Raids on the Unspeakable

A collection of his recent prose writings in which Thomas Merton looks candidly at the world of the Sixties. Abstract drawings by the author. *Paperback,* $1.95

Dylan Thomas / The Doctor and the Devils

The poet's principal scripts for film and radio. *Hardbound,* $5.00

Yukio Mishima / Death in Midsummer

Nine short stories and a *no* play by Japan's foremost novelist. "There is no question of Mishima's versatility and lively talent nor, thanks to the flawless translations, is there any doubt of his virtuosity as a stylist."—*Howard Hibbett, Saturday Review. Hardbound,* $5.50; *Paperback,* $2.25

Please send for our complete catalogue.

NEW DIRECTIONS, 333 Sixth Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10014

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE FAULKNER-COWLEY FILE
Letters and Memories, 1944-1962

by Malcolm Cowley

"The choicest items are 23 letters in which Faulkner answered questions about his works . . . but 11 Cowley letters to Faulkner show him as an editor of taste, tact, and intelligence."—JOSEPH BLOTNER, *N. Y. Times Book Review*. "Both Faulkner's letters and Cowley's reminiscences are informative, and Cowley's closing tribute to his distinguished friend is wise as well as warmhearted."
—GRANVILLE HICKS, *Saturday Review* $5.00

THE AMERICAN 1890s
Life and Times of a Lost Generation

by Larzer Ziff

A brilliant study of the generation of talented writers who emerged in the transitional 1890s, introducing new notes into the main stream of American letters, some of them not recognized until much later. "An extremely intelligent work of literary history—beautifully informed, strong and sensitive in conception, powerfully argued. An excellent book."—ALFRED KAZIN
$7.50

TELL ME, TELL ME
Granite, Steel, and Other Topics

by Marianne Moore

A welcome treat for devotees of her work, her first separate volume since 1959 contains all the poems written since then (thirteen never before published in book form), plus three prose pieces which throw light on the imaginative process. $3.95

WEATHERS AND EDGES

by Philip Booth

Strength and simplicity mark these new poems by the Lamont Prize-winning author of *Letter from a Distant Land*. "A testament so terse, so mature, that the words in it seem blown by the oldest wind on earth against the oldest rock."
—MARK VAN DOREN $4.50

THE VIKING PRESS, 625 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SCHOLARLY BOOKS

AMS PRESS

FALL 1966

Write for Complete Catalogue

56 East 13th Street
New York, N.Y. 10003

HERMANN HESSE AND HIS CRITICS
By Joseph Mileck $9.00

POEMS OF GOETHE
New Translations Facing the Originals by
Edwin H. Zeydel $9.00

YOUNG NIETZSCHE
And The Wagnerian Experience
By Frederick R. Love $9.00

THE WORKS OF STEFAN GEORGE
Rendered into English by
Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz $9.00

GOETHE'S SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY
By Alfred G. Steer, Jr. $9.00

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New

LANGUAGE AS SYMBOLIC ACTION

Essays on Life, Literature, and Method. KENNETH BURKE. Praised by W. H. Auden as "the most brilliant and suggestive critic now writing in America," Kenneth Burke is even more an innovator of the first rank in the philosophy of language and literature. $6.95

TOWARDS A BETTER LIFE

Being a Series of Epistles, or Declamations. KENNETH BURKE. "To begin with, a poet. His absence of affectation is one of the rarest things on earth. . . . His arguments are an incentive, no matter what turn they take."—Marianne Moore $4.95

MODERN HEBREW POETRY

A Bilingual Anthology. Edited and translated by RUTH FINER MINTZ. The 115 poems in this volume represent the styles and themes of 28 of the important Hebrew poets of this century. $7.00

THE RHETORIC OF SCIENCE

A Study of Scientific Ideas and Imagery in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry. WILLIAM POWELL JONES. The first book to assess the influence of scientific ideas and imagery in 18th-century English poetry as it continues the ferment of the 17th century. $6.00

THE WORKS OF JOHN DRYDEN, VOLUME IX

Plays: The Indian Emperour, Secret Love, Sir Martin Mar-all. Edited by JOHN LOFTIS *and* VINTON A. DEARING. A definitive edition of 3 of John Dryden's most famous plays, all of them first produced between 1665 and 1667. $10.00

THE ILL-FRAMED KNIGHT

A Skeptical Inquiry into the Identity of Sir Thomas Malory. WILLIAM MATTHEWS. "I have been fascinated—absolutely fascinated by this. . . . Am enchanted by the substance of the book: a wonderful piece of research."—Hugh Trevor-Roper. $6.50

MARINA CVETAEVA

Her Life and Art. SIMON KARLINSKY. Marina Cvetaeva (1892-1941) was one of the great Russian poets of the 20th century. This is the first full-scale critical and biographical study of Cvetaeva to be published in any language. $7.25

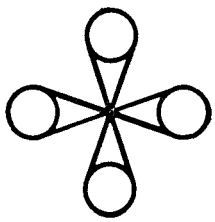
CONCEPTIONS OF REALITY IN MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

L. S. DEMBO. A perceptive critical study which brings to a focus some of the important literary and philosophic issues raised in 20th-century American poetry. $6.00

from California

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS Berkeley 94720

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



BOLLINGEN SERIES FALL 1966

THE KARIYE DJAMI
By PAUL A. UNDERWOOD. The definitive work on the remarkable 14th-century Byzantine mosaics and frescoes uncovered after centuries in a small church in Istanbul. 434 monochrome, 119 color plates. 3 vols., 9½" x 12½", boxed.
September, $55.00

NICOLAS POUSSIN
The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1958. By ANTHONY BLUNT. A comprehensive account of Poussin's life and development, and his theory of art. Illustrated with 265 plates of the corpus of Poussin's paintings and 271 comparative subjects. 2 vols., 9⅜" x 12", boxed.
November, $25.00

THE PORTRAIT IN THE RENAISSANCE
The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1963. By JOHN POPE-HENNESSY. Two centuries of experiment and development in portraiture, from the great Florentine fresco cycles through the masters of the High Renaissance. 330 halftones.
November, $12.50

TWO ADDRESSES
By ST.-JOHN PERSE. Two speeches by the Nobel Prize-winning poet: his Nobel acceptance in 1960, and his Inauguration Address at Dante's 7th Centenary in Florence in 1965. French texts with translations by W. H. Auden and Robert Fitzgerald.
September, $2.00

ELEUSIS: ARCHETYPAL IMAGE OF MOTHER AND DAUGHTER
Archetypal Images in Greek Religion, Volume 4. By C. KERÉNYI. Translated from the German by Ralph Manheim. A reconstruction of the Eleusinian Mysteries through the study of archaeology, objects of art, and religious history. Over 80 text figures.
January, $5.00

THE SPIRIT IN MAN, ART, AND LITERATURE
Volume 15 of the Collected Works of C. G. Jung. Edited by GERHARD ADLER, MICHAEL FORDHAM, and HERBERT READ. Translated from the German by R. F. C. Hull. Nine essays on the qualities of personality found in the creative spirit.
November, $4.50

Two new editions of volumes previously issued in the Collected Works of C. G. Jung

TWO ESSAYS ON ANALYTICAL PSYCHOLOGY
Volume 7. "New Paths in Psychology" (1912) and "The Structure of the Unconscious" (1916), in a revised translation, with the newly discovered original texts included in an appendix.
January, $4.50

PSYCHOLOGY AND ALCHEMY
Volume 12. Now completely revised, with improved illustrations, new bibliography and index. 270 text figures.
October, $7.50

Please order from your bookstore. Published by Bollingen Foundation. Distributed by Pantheon Books, 22 East 51st St., New York City 10022. For detailed catalogue, write to Bollingen Series, 140 East 62nd St., New York City 10021

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JAMES DICKEY

Turning Away

Variations on Estrangement

I

Something for a long time has gone wrong,
Got in between this you and that one other
And now here you must turn away.

Beyond! Beyond! Another life moves

In numbing clarity begins
By looking out the simple-minded window,
The face untimely relieved
Of living the expression of its love.

II

Shy, sad, adolescent separated-out
The gaze stands alone in the meadow
Like a king starting out on a journey
Away from all things that he knows.
It stands there there

With the ghost's will to see and not tell
What it sees with its nerveless vision
Of sorrow, its queen-killing glare:
The apple tree in the wind
Paling with noon sleep,
Light pouring down from the day-moon
White-hot inside the sun's mildness,

The eyes clamped by an ordinary meadow
As by the latest masterpiece
Under the sun.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

III

For the face a studded look slowly
Arrives from a gulley of chickweed
Like a beard, come from something
Unwanted, that the face cannot help all its life.
Hair curls inside the jaws
Unstoppable mindless turns white
Turns straight chokes
Helplessly, in more and more dangerous
Iron-masked silence.

IV

A deadly, dramatic compression
Is made of the normal brow. Because of it
The presence of the hand upon the sill
Calms and does not shake the thing beheld.
Every stone within sight stands ready
To give you its secret
Of impassivity, its unquestionable
Silence: you wear
Its reason for existence where you stand

So still the tongue grows solid also
Holding back the rock speech.

V

A hooked shape threads
Through your nostrils, and you have
Caesar's eagle look, and nothing
For it to do,
Even though, on the golden
Imperial helmet, little doors close over
Your face, and your head is covered
With military flowers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VI

Turning away,
You foresee the same fields you watch.
They are there an instant
Before they are ready: a stream being slowly suspended
Between its weeds, running where it once was,
Keeping its choir-sounds going
All like crowned boys
But now among grasses that are
An enormous green bright growing No
That frees forever.

VII

The mutual scar on the hand of man
And woman, earned in the kitchen,
Comes forth rises for you to brush
Off like a cutworm
As the weed with wings explodes
In air, laying in front of you down
Cheap flowers by hundreds of thousands
And you try to get by heart
The words written after the end

Of every marriage manual, back
To the beginning, saying
Change; form again; flee.

VIII

Despair and exultation
Lie down together and thrash
In the hot grass, no blade moving.
A stark freedom primes your new loins:
Turning away, you can breed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

With the farthest women

And the farthest also in time: breed
Through bees, like flowers and bushes:
Breed Greeks, Egyptians and Romans hoplites
Peasants caged kings clairvoyant bastards:
The earth's whole history blazes
To become this light
For you are released to all others,

All places and times of all women,
And for their children hunger
Also: for those who could be half
You, half someone unmet,
Someone dead, immortal, or coming.

Near you, some being suddenly
Also free, is weeping her body away.

IX

The watched fields shake shake
Half blind with scrutiny.
All working together, grasshoppers
Push on a stem apiece
And the breathless meadow begins
To sway dissolve revolve:

Faintness but the brain rights
Itself with a sigh in the skull
And sees again nothing
But intensified grass. Listen:
When this much is wrong, one can fix one's head

In peacetime turning away
From an old peaceful love
To a helmet of silent war
Against the universe and see

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What to do with it all: see with the eyes
Of a very great general
Roads ditches trees
Which have sunk their roots to provide
Not shade but covering-fire.

X

Somewhere in this guarded encampment
The soul stands steathily up
To desert: stands up like the sex
About to run running

Through pinewoods creeks changes of light night
And day the wide universe streaming over it
As it stands there panting over-sensitized
Filled with blood from the feet

Heartbeating surviving in the last

Place in cloud river meadowgrass or grave waiting
For bird beast or plant to tell it
How to use itself whom to meet what to do
Which way to go to join
The most ineffectual army the defiant, trembling
Corps of the unattached.

XI

Fear passes
Into sweat hidden openly
In the instant new lines of the brow. The field
Deepens in peace, as though, even
Before battle, it were rich-
ening with a generation's
Thousand best, quietest men
In long grass bending east

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To west. Turning away, seeing fearful
Ordinary ground, boys' eyes manlike go,
The middle-aged man's like a desperate
Boy's, the old man's like a new angel's

Beholding the river in all
White places rushing
At and burning its boulders
Quietly the current laid
In threads as, idly, a conqueror's horse,

Ox-headed, is born of the shape of a cloud
That was an unnoticed
Deep-hanging bed.
Water waves in the air,
A slant, branded darkness
From a distant field full of horses
Uprisen into a cloud
That is their oversoul.

XII

Under the great drifting stallion
With his foreleg bloatedly cocked, the armed
Men who could spring from your teeth
Increase their strength in your jaws:

XIII

So many battles
Fought in cow pastures fought back
And forth over anybody's farm
With men or only
With wounded eyes—
Fought in the near yellow crops
And the same crops blue farther off.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

XIV

Dead armies' breath like a sunflower
Stirs, where the loved-too-long
Lie with a whimper of scythes.
Coming to them, the seeds
Of distant plants either die
Or burn out when they touch
Ground, or are born in this place.
Rain is born rain: let tons of repossessed
Water walk to us!

XV

You may have swallowed a thistle
Or the first drop of rain;
You have been open-mouthed.
Now speak of battles that bring

To light no blood, but strew the meadows
With inner lives:
Speak now with the thistle's sharpness
Piercing floating descending
In flowers all over the field
With a dog-noise low in the calyx.

XVI

Like a hound, you can smell the earth change
As your cloud comes over the sun
Like a called horse.
The long field summons its armies
From every underground
Direction. Prepare to fight
The past flee lie down,
Heartbeat a noise in your head
Like knocking the rungs from a ladder:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So many things stand wide
Open! Distance is helplessly deep
On all sides and you can enter, alone,
Anything anything can go

On wherever it wishes anywhere in the world or in time
But here and now.

XVII

Turning away, the eyes do not mist over
Despite the alien sobbing in the room.
Withhold! Withhold! Stand by this window

As on guard

Duty rehearsing what you will answer
If questioned stand

General deserter freed slave belovèd of all,
Giving off behind your back
Ridiculous energy stand

Like a proof of character learned
From Caesar's *Wars* from novels
Read in the dark,
Thinking of your life as a thing
That can be learned,
As those earnest young heroes learned theirs,
Later, much later on.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROGER SALE

The Achievement of William Empson

EVERYONE KNOWS EMPSON BY NAME, and more people know his reputation than have read even one of his books. The case against him has always been that he is too clever by far: ingenious and brilliant, but dangerous in ways that words like "irresponsible" and "unreliable" only begin to convey. As yet, however, detractors have not realized why Empson is the only critic they dislike against whom their passion is not intellectual but moral. Empson is supposedly interested in words, yet it is unlikely that such an interest, carried even to new peaks of madness, would incite such shocked response; one would expect excited hunts after ambiguities to be met by geniality or patronizing contempt. The attacks on Empson, it turns out, are ineptly mounted, poorly executed, and aimed at the wrong target, but they are done in the right spirit. He does have large designs on his reader, and even those who cannot understand rightly a word he says can somehow feel that.

Much the best attack on Empson was made by another man no one trusts, Hugh Kenner, in an excellent review of *The Structure of Complex Words* that ended with this summary:

> The infectious zest of *Ambiguity* was like that of a boy taking watches apart, but it was at least related to a sense of the wonder of watches. Mr. Empson has always taken poetry seriously, though like Alice confronted with vanishing cats he has always maintained in its presence a disconcerting composure; since poetry like everything else to this supple Carrollean intelligence is a trick we conspire to believe in. It is melancholy that in a book from which much of the enthusiasm has retired he is Alice no longer; he has accommodated himself at length to his image of the Victorian scientist, who was "believed to have discovered a new kind of Roman virtue," and whom the public could always surprise, as Alice did the White Knight, obliviously head down in his suit of armor, hung with bellows and beehives, "patiently labouring at his absurd but fruitful conceptions."[1]

[1] Hugh Kenner, "Alice in Empsonland," THE HUDSON REVIEW, V (1952), 144. Reprinted in *Gnomon* (New York, 1958), p. 262.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kenner is the first man since Empson who tried to pretend when very young that he had read everything; in addition he is a Christian and a conservative while Empson hates God and is staunchly of the left. Both are extremely intelligent men who discuss poetry in unconventional ways. But Kenner's image of Empson "patiently labouring at his absurd but fruitful conceptions" is not so much partisan as wrong, and wrong because Kenner had to state his case condescendingly, a way most of his readers probably found generous, in order to avoid seeing what Empson is really all about. For to a mind like Kenner's Empson is the supreme villain. Empson has dared not only to agree with the conservative myth of history spawned by Yeats and Eliot, not only to document that myth better than anyone else has done, but also to stand four square against the implications of the myth by insisting that it had not killed him, his imagination, or his sense of moral choice. Kenner on Empson is like Eliot on Lawrence in his refusal to admit that what he had on his hands was not a liberal but a hero, not a Whig or an illiterate but someone who knows all he knows and much more besides.

Seven Types of Ambiguity was written in Empson's last year at Cambridge and published in 1930, when its author was twenty-four. The reviews were baffled and eager to admit it was a kind of daring trick; Empson became famous. Dr. Leavis, an early admirer, praised his early poems and published in *Scrutiny* both Empson on Marvell and on Proletarian Literature and an essay by M. C. Bradbrook on *Seven Types*. The author himself was in Japan at the time; he returned in 1934 and a year later published his first volumes of poems and *Some Versions of Pastoral*. He reviewed a great deal in the middle thirties, and by 1937, when he made his first trip to China, he had also written seven of the chapters that later became *The Structure of Complex Words* and many of the poems published in 1940 as *The Gathering Storm*. The English seemed disappointed in the second volumes of both poetry and criticism, but news of him had traveled sufficiently slowly that in this country he was just beginning to generate excitement and horror. It was, however, as a New Critic, of all things, that he was imported and it is as a New Critic that he is known even today. Empson was in China until 1939, when he returned to work for the BBC; he went back to Peking after

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the war and stayed until 1952, when he was made a professor of English at Sheffield. *Complex Words* appeared in 1951 and *Milton's God* a decade later, and he has also written a number of long essays, on Shakespeare, Donne, and Fielding especially, which he has not put into a book. The impression has grown since the war that he is no longer interested in literature, and he himself has added to it by commenting as much on Mr. W. H., Aztec art, and the Warren Report as on any poem. But, although *Seven Types of Ambiguity* is known as a young man's book, it was not mere allegiance to his earlier self that led him to say in a revised edition: "Sixteen years later I find myself prepared to stand by nearly the whole heap" (p. viii).[2]

It is as a heap, furthermore, that the book is best examined. Most discussions have picked on its least interesting aspects, its use of the word "ambiguity" and its ranging of the "types" along a scale of "advancing logical disorder." But these matters are really minor. On the first page Empson demonstrates the way the sentence "The brown cat sat on the red mat" can be considered ambiguous, just to show how the trick works and to insist that he is not interested in pulling ambiguities out of uninteresting sentences. The book, he says, is not philosophical but literary, and its aim is to examine lines Empson finds beautiful and haunting. The seven types are only pegs and "ambiguity" is a kind of hatrack, yet of all the analyses only the first, on "Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang," and the last, on Herbert's "The Sacrifice," have been looked at carefully.[3] Perhaps during the thirties any student of Richards had to be called a theoretician, but more likely few readers were eager to climb into the arena with such an enthusiast to battle out just what the lines do mean.

Some of the analyses, to be sure, are not very good, and many more would be intolerable were it not for the urbanity and wit-

[2] Quotations from Empson's works are from the following texts: *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York, 1955), 3rd edition; *Some Versions of Pastoral* (Norfolk, Conn., 1960); *The Structure of Complex Words* (Norfolk, n.d.); *Milton's God* (Norfolk, 1961); *Collected Poems* (New York, 1949). These are the only editions available in this country.

[3] On "Bare ruin'd choirs," see F. W. Bateson, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," *Essays in Criticism* III (1953), 1-25, and debate in "The Critical Forum" in subsequent issues; on "The Sacrifice," see Rosemond Tuve, "On Herbert's Sacrifice," *Kenyon Review*, XII (1950), 51-75. This essay was later expanded into the first chapter of Miss Tuve's *A Reading of George Herbert*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tiness of the man making the paraphrase. But in at least fifteen places Empson shows that the aim of analysis is not so much understanding lines as uncovering whole tracts of the mind, and the book is studded with the right things said about a poet or an historical period. In the first chapter alone, Peacock "makes himself a cradle and rocks in it," and the analysis holds for much nineteenth-century poetry besides Peacock's (p. 27); with the Spenserian stanza "you have to yield yourself to it very completely to take in the variety of its movement, and, at the same time, there is no need to concentrate the elements of the situation into a judgment as if for action," an idea the implications of which make most Spenserian study irrelevant (p. 41); Sidney's "Double Sestine" "beats, however rich its orchestration, with a wailing and immovable monotony, for ever upon the same doors in vain," so that "a whole succession of feelings about the local scenery, the whole way in which it is taken for granted, has been enlisted into sorrow and beats as a single passion of the mind" (pp. 44, 46).

The beauty of these sentences lies in the uncanny accuracy of their impressionism, showing just what it is like to be a reader of these poems. Sidney's poem is hard to talk about because it is so obviously beautiful and because its conventions seem so conventional. Empson simply insists that the convention *is* the beauty so that unless we acknowledge its "immovable monotony" we cannot see that in order to praise the poem we must praise the monotony. To be able to speak this way, of course, is to do just the opposite of what he is usually accused of doing. Instead of poetry serving as trick for his "supple Carrollean intelligence," it stands as something to be gone to on its own grounds. It is precisely this willingness to go out that makes Empson so protean, so evasive about theoretical matters, so often to the point about poems. For he knows in ways that can only create humility in his readers that if he cannot make the lines beautiful, memorable, and rich, he has no business talking about them. To be sure, this involves him in forcing the evidence—the analyses of Shakespearean sonnets, for instance, are uniformly uninteresting in this book—but the aim, even there, is to force the reader to ask, "Well, how *would* I read the lines?"

This ability to ask such questions, and the accompanying imag-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inative sympathy for so many different kinds of poems, are the qualities his admirers most often praise. But this much only allows *Seven Types* to be a kind of primer in advanced practical criticism, and more must be claimed, for reasons made clear in the very first chapter. Empson quotes two lines of Arthur Waley's:

> Swiftly the years beyond recall.
> Solemn the stillness of this spring morning.

These lines are like Sidney's in the way they seem to ask to be categorized as merely beautiful. Empson makes them far more:

> The human mind has two main scales on which to measure time. The large one takes the length of a human life as its unit, so that there is nothing to be done about life, it is of an animal dignity and simplicity, and must be regarded from a peaceable and fatalistic point of view. The small one takes as its unit the conscious moment, and it is from this that you consider the neighbouring space, an activity of the will, delicacies of social tone, and your personality. The scales are so far apart as almost to give the effect of defining two dimensions; they do not come into contact because what is too large to be conceived by the one is still too small to be conceived by the other. Thus, taking the two units as a century and the quarter of a second, their ratio is ten to the tenth and their mean is the standard working day; or taking the smaller one as five minutes, their mean is the whole of summer. The repose and self-command given by the use of the first are contrasted with the speed at which it shows the years to be passing from you, and therefore with the fear of death; the fever and multiplicity of life, as shown by the use of the second, are contrasted with the calm of the external space of which it gives consciousness, with the absolute or extra-temporal value attached to the brief moments of self-knowledge with which it is concerned, and with a sense of security in that it makes death so far off.
>
> Both these time scales and their contrasts are included by these lines in a single act of apprehension, because of the words *swift* and *still*. Being contradictory as they stand, they demand to be conceived in different ways; we are enabled, therefore, to meet the open skies with an answering stability of self-knowledge; to meet the brevity of human life with an ironical sense that it is morning and springtime, that there is a whole summer before winter, and a whole day before night.
>
> *(pp. 29-30)*

After this it is hard to understand the claim that Empson was only interested in poetic texture, harder still to see how anyone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

could claim he could not write well. For the passage, though spectacular, is also typical in its focusing of whole ranges of human feeling, in its quiet insistence that we have always known about the two time scales and that "there is nothing to be done about life, it is of an animal dignity and simplicity, and must be regarded from a peaceable and fatalistic point of view." We expect our moralists to be solemn and glowering, like Leavis or Eliot, and so no one saw that not only is Empson a moralist, not only was he from the beginning fighting the narrowness that other literary moralists tried to impose, not only has he routed later efforts to read poetry without morality made by the New Criticism and the subsequent anatomizers and mythographers, but he has opened up whole areas of poetry for us to see new strata of feelings about human value. Of course if we think narrowly about morality, a term like "moral vision" will seem too stern, for all it can mean here is an acknowledgment of Empson's awareness of choices, distinctions, values, articulating two apparently flat and lovely lines of poetry. It is with this kind of poem that Empson is most exciting in *Seven Types*—passages like Sidney's, like the tautological things in Pope, like the use of "the *a* and *b* of *c*" in Shakespeare. The implications of Empson's interest here become clearer in the later books, but hints are scattered in this one, most notably in the image of Christ as the hero in Herbert's "The Sacrifice." Before turning to that, however, we must consider some other complaints made about this book and about Empson in general.

It did not take long for people to discover that Empson often misquotes, or argues irrespective of the context of the lines. Even in the third edition of *Seven Types* many misquotations remain, though as many have been corrected. Empson ostentatiously quotes from facsimiles of the original Shakespearean texts as though they had some mystic validity, and then proceeds to misspell, give wrong line numbers, or, in one instance, transpose phrases. He quotes from the first rather than from the fifth edition of Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat,* and from an edition of Yeats's "Fergus and the Druid" that in 1930 was out of date by twenty years. He quotes a stanza from "The Canonization" and leaves out a line that might jar with his reading. He mispunctuates Eliot's "Whispers of Immortality" so as to give the poem a read-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing not available to readers of the correct version. He calls Clarissa's speech in *The Rape of the Lock* part of the "Essay on Women" and he calls a quatrain of Housman's *A Shropshire Lad,* xlviii, in which he makes eight copying mistakes, one of the *Last Poems.* R. G. Cox, reviewing the second edition, said, "some of these errors are trivial, others less so, but they all help to undermine the reader's confidence in a critic who stakes so much on close verbal and grammatical analysis."[4] It is awkward indeed to disagree with this and come down on the side of sloppiness, but it does seem that the sniffiness of Empson's detractors, combined with their inability to understand him, does much to undermine one's confidence in them. But no summing up can discount his almost incredible penchant to be lax about details, nor can it ignore even more disturbing faults that came to light in an exchange Empson had with Robert Martin Adams about "Milton and Bentley." Adams uncovered a really shocking number of misquotations in the essay, many of which were quite damaging. Empson replied that he hadn't his notes with him when he wrote the essay, that he didn't understand all this fussiness about accuracy, that his point still stood. But Adams had already shown that Empson's "point" was hardly earth-shaking anyway and had been both mis- and over-stated. Most surprising, though, was Empson's retaliation via a deliberately unfair aside in *Milton's God* about Adams' *Ikon,* where he ridicules out of hand Adams' critique of Empson's general position about Milton. With every other assailant Empson has been courteous and generous, but in this one case he was devious in a way one came to expect he could never be.[5]

Certainly in the exchange with Rosemond Tuve about "The Sacrifice," to return to that, he is quite winning. In *Seven Types* he points out one genuine double meaning in the poem, then goes on to point up the paradoxes implicit in Herbert's vision of Christ. Miss Tuve, generous in her praise of Empson and generous indeed to overlook one of his more glaring misquotations, showed quite convincingly that Herbert's view of Christ is really a traditional one. Finally, she spoke against his elaborate reading of the famous stanza that includes the line, "Man stole the

[4] R. G. Cox, "Ambiguity Revisited," *Scrutiny,* XV (1949), 148.

[5] Robert Martin Adams, "Empson and Bentley," *Partisan Review,* XXI (1954) 178-189; Empson's retaliation is in *Milton's God,* p. 15.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fruit, but I must climb the tree." Empson quickly admitted that undergraduate exuberance had produced some of his sentences and insisted his case stood up rather well nonetheless. What he did not do, what Miss Tuve did not do, was show that most of his excesses would be in fact accurate statements if he had used other stanzas. That is, Empson's reading of the poem is sound even if his reading of this stanza is not. Characteristically, he tried to uphold his argument at its weakest point—his strategy seems to be that if you reread the poem you will see other, better evidence to support his generalization lying all around and so become convinced that far from being an outlandish stretcher of evidence he is in fact a modest imp trying to defy the laws of sense and gravity. But in her absorption with her own problem about history Miss Tuve did not see this—nor did she see that Empson's real interest is not so much Herbert as Christ Himself. His last description is of

> the complete Christ; scapegoat and tragic hero; loved because hated; hated because godlike; freeing from torture because tortured; torturing his torturers because all-merciful; source of all strength to men because by exaggerating he accepts their weakness; and, because outcast, creating the possibility of society. *(p. 263)*

Miss Tuve can take "because outcast, creating the possibility of society" and insist this is true of many traditional Christ figures. She had forgotten, and Empson would never tell her, that *that* point had been made years earlier, and beautifully, by Empson himself. For "because outcast, creating the possibility of society" is the subject of *Some Versions of Pastoral,* the book Empson obviously was writing in his head as he finished *Seven Types of Ambiguity.*

Pastoral has been quite widely praised and it is from this book that anthologies of criticism take their Empson material. His way of seeing pastoral has been vulgarized into part of normal critical machinery, vulgarized primarily because Empson's pastoral is not a critical tool and is not even so much an idea as it is a mode of belief. This is Empson's best book because in it he can move from the work at hand to his vision with almost no shoving of the evidence, so even though his prose and organization may seem difficult on first reading, he turns with almost indescribable grace from the smallest particular to the largest generalization

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and back to various middle grounds. When one becomes used to the book and begins to hear the massive chords of its orchestrations supporting even the most irrelevant aside, the effect is one only the greatest books can produce—it envelops and controls such large areas of the imagination that for a while one is willing to admit it is the only book ever written. As a modern work of persuasion it is unrivaled.

If anything like these claims are possible for it, paraphrase of its idea of pastoral could only be irrelevant. Fortunately, though, the book opens with a famous passage about a famous poem that serves as a miniature of the whole:

> Gray's elegy is an odd case of poetry with latent political ideas:
>
> Full many a gem of purest ray serene
> The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air.
>
> What this means, as the context makes clear, is that eighteenth century England had no scholarship system or *carrière ouverte aux talents.* *(p. 4)*

Of course no one before Empson thought this quatrain had anything to do with a scholarship system, but the next stanza does refer to the mute inglorious Milton and the interpretation does hold, especially given Empson's continuation:

> This is stated as pathetic, but the reader is put in a mood in which he would not try to alter it. By comparing the social arrangement to Nature he makes it seem inevitable, which it was not, and gives it a dignity which was undeserved.

This makes clear why we do not think of the lines as politically committed and why it is essential to Gray's method that we don't. Nor is Empson only betraying his own bias when he says the dignity of the social arrangement was undeserved; no one would say the flower "deserves" to waste its sweetness, and "waste" is Gray's word, not Empson's.

The next sentences seem to me mistaken, both tactically and in fact:

> Furthermore, a gem does not mind being in a cave and a flower prefers not to be picked; we feel that the man is like the flower, as short-lived, natural, and valuable, and this tricks us into feeling that he is better off without opportunities. The sexual suggestion of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> *blush* brings in the Christian idea that virginity is good in itself, and so any renunciation is good; this may trick us into feeling it is lucky for the poor man that society keeps him unspotted from the world.

Empson had already shown how Gray's tone controls the comparison of the men of the churchyard to nature, and there are other stanzas in the poem that may trick us into feeling the poor man is lucky because unspotted. There is thus no need to go on about the feelings of the gem or the flower or to imagine the flower is renouncing its chance to be seen. The flower, like the men, does not know what its choices are—that is the point about the scholarship system—and so has nothing consciously to give up. Many people who already feel Empson always goes too far come on sentences like these and throw up their hands. But the temptation should be resisted, for the sake of the next sentence:

> The tone of melancholy claims that the poet understands the considerations opposed to aristocracy, though he judges against them.

From here he moves out, as if for the final generalization:

> The truism of the reflections in the churchyard, the universality and impersonality this gives to the style, claims as if by comparison that we ought to accept the injustice of society as we do the inevitability of death.

It is dangerous to speak of a "truism" giving "universality" to a style only if one's sensitivity to Gray's particular style is weak. That Empson's is not is nowhere better shown than in the phrase "as if by comparison," for it summarizes neatly the way Gray does not make the comparison between injustice and death and yet does make the lot of the poor seem as inevitable as dying.

Empson moves off at this point to discuss objections people have had to the poem, so that the largest generalization, when it does come in the next paragraph, has the effect of opening a whole chasm of truth and beauty:

> And yet what is said is one of the permanent truths; it is only in degree that any improvement of society could prevent wastage of human powers; the waste even in a fortunate life, the isolation even of a life rich in intimacy, cannot but be felt deeply, and is the central feeling of tragedy. And anything of value must accept this because it must not prostitute itself; its strength is to be prepared to waste itself, if it does not get its opportunity. *(p. 5)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And yet what is said is one of the permanent truths"—it is hard to imagine another critic using the phrase, especially after having apparently exhausted himself in a series of fireworks that expose the trickery of Gray's method. The truths themselves, though beautifully stated and able to throw fresh light on a play like *Hamlet, are* permanent and so therefore do have an air of tautology. Yet they ring for me long after I felt I saw around the strategy that creates them, because they show how much a mind can discover when it seeks to make of literature what it deserves. Large though the statement is, the lines of Gray continue to be heard in it, and as the flower and the poor farmer reverberate in "the central feeling of tragedy," the implications of pastoral begin to be felt.

The moment one tries to line up the key terms like this, however, one sees how much would be lost if Empson simply "said what he meant." For the task of *Pastoral* is not to show how many thing are like so many other things, but to express the feelings that animate a large historical period of our literature, running from just before 1600 to the middle of the last century. Empson is trying to explore the relation of the commonplace to the profound, and he knows that while on a linear scale the two will lie far apart from each other, on a circular scale they will be side by side. He wants to insist that the commonplace is common and the profound is not, but also that the opposite is true because the common is itself profound enough so that our most usual ideas about life are deserving of great care and respect. The aim of his analysis, then, is not esoteric brilliance but sensible reflection.

The intricacy of even one essay in the book would take pages to explain, so the best that can be offered here is a hint of the whole. We can begin with the above statement about "the isolation even of a life rich in intimacy" and move to the end of the first chapter:

> The poetic statements of human waste and limitations, whose function is to give strength to see life clearly and so adopt a fuller attitude to it, usually bring in, or leave room for the reader to bring in, the whole set of pastoral ideas. *(p. 19)*

The end of this paragraph clarifies some of this whole set of pastoral ideas:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> They assume it is sometimes a good thing to stand apart from society as far as you can. They assume that some people are more delicate and complex than others, and that if people can keep this distinction from doing harm it is a good thing, though a small thing by comparison with our common humanity. *(p. 20)*

The moment we stress simultaneously the commonalty of all people and the specialness of some people we begin to make one out of the other, to put the Many into the One and end with the twin figures of swain and hero. Empson's way of handling these figures allows him to narrate a history that avoids all the great difficulties Eliot, Yeats, and others had run into when they tried to imagine a golden age that began to fall apart during the Renaissance. The relation between the hero or swain and the people is indeed expressive of a sensibility that can unify, but this unifying exists for Empson primarily as a metaphor and not as a moment in history. Shepherd and hero appear in *Pastoral* primarily in the background, usually combined as Christ, while the foreground is occupied by those figures who are only versions of pastoral because the movement of the culture prevented their being more than this. Christ is not an historical figure who precedes the Renaissance, but a literary and religious metaphor that undergoes a radical change beginning at the end of the sixteenth century. What historical facts lie behind the metaphor Empson never asks; he is interested, rather, in what happened afterwards. Thus Empson's choice of where to begin is not at all haphazard, as many have said, and his chapter on the Elizabethan double plot, which seems so rambling, is in fact unified by his historical vision. In the Renaissance drama a genuine pastoral figure, one capable of expressing herself and her world simultaneously, is matched by a conjuror who shows how the pastoral goddess can use her power to destroy. Margaret, in Greene's *Friar Bacon*, is pastoral in all senses of the word, but she is balanced by Bacon, who shows that her beauty, like his magic, can be black as well as white. Only a decade later the earth-goddess has become Cressida and the conjuror Pandarus, and twenty years after that the goddess is Beatrice-Joanna and the conjuror is DeFlores in *The Changeling*. What had been "the people" becomes a worldly magician who can elevate the goddess and make her expressive of her world, but the transformation also

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shows that he can destroy her and her world. So too Donne's mistress is a goddess and Donne the conjuror of a world in which they can live. In each instance the particular person is elevated to a generalization: Cressida becomes the strumpet Fortune passing from the Trojan to the Greek camp; DeFlores echoes the madmen of the subplot as he tells Alsemero he coupled with Beatrice at barley-break, and so all are mad and in hell; Donne makes whole globes of his mistress' tears.

The Renaissance is thus seen as a moment when the pastoral tie of hero and people is breaking, and the hero is suddenly capable of tragic and destructive isolation despite his life rich in intimacy; and the people become capable of magical destruction as well as rebellion and civil war. It is, of course, in Shakespeare that the ground for such an idea is most fertile. In Sonnet 94 a profound irony controls the implied comparison between the summer's flower and those that have power. The comparison does hold and the trick of making a political hero a kind of natural object can express Shakespeare's pastoral love, but only under great strain. Thus Empson's paraphrase of the sonnet, which ends with the accepting, "I am only sure that you are valuable and in danger," begins with, "I am praising to you the contemptible things you admire, you little plotter" (p. 96). Thus, too, Hal and Bassanio and Angelo, about whom the older men, Falstaff, Antonio, the Duke, must be ironic and even bitter in order to be loving. "Man is so placed," says Empson, speaking for Shakespeare, "that the sort of thing you do is in degree all that anyone can do; success does not come from mere virtue, and without some external success a virtue is not real even to itself. One must not look elsewhere; success of the same nature as yours is all that the dignity, whether of life or poetry, can be based upon." As in dealing with the quatrain of Gray's, Empson may seem to have strayed, but we need only to reread the lines about the way "The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,/ though to itself it only live and die," to hear the relevance of Empson's assertion. Even better, we can add to Sonnet 94 other passages which Empson has suddenly made memorable: Falstaff's praise of sherris-sack at Hal's expense in *2 Henry IV,* the Duke's refusal to grant Angelo's request that he be executed in Act V of *Measure for Measure.* Finally, as Empson moves out to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the heights once again, we can see how he is both commenting superbly on this Shakespearean situation and making his fullest statement of his vision:

> This queer sort of realism, indeed, is one of the main things he had to say. The feeling that life is essentially inadequate to the human spirit, and yet that a good life must avoid saying so, is naturally at home with most versions of pastoral; in pastoral you take a limited life and pretend it is the full and normal one, and a suggestion that one must do this with all life, because the normal is itself limited, is easily put into the trick though not necessary to its power.

With this remarkable passage we can turn three ways, and we should do so simultaneously as much as possible. We need to continue to listen to the Shakespearean poetry of the nineties; we need to compare this with the earlier passage about the waste in a life rich in intimacy to see their striking similarities; we need to examine it by itself as a moral assertion. For here is perhaps the clearest instance of the Empsonian miracle; by saying the best he knows about Shakespeare, he fills out the dimensions of his own moral vision. Because he can do this, he can show once and for all how the great historian lives and knows himself by knowing the past and making it live.

Once *Some Versions of Pastoral* is seen as a history of literary responses to disintegration, the later swains fall into place: Marvell's greatness hinges on his maintaining an equipoise that makes irrelevant the usual distinction between instinctive apprehension and conscious choice; Milton's nostalgia demands an envious and high-minded Satan to interpret Eden for us; Macheath's bitter cry that "At the Tree I shall suffer with pleasure" is based on his acceptance that he is and is not Christ; Alice's wandering in the world of the looking glass articulates a snobbery based on the idea "that virtue and intelligence are alike lonely, and that good manners are therefore important though an absurd confession of human limitations" (p. 281). At the end we see what history forced upon us, a transformation from an implicitly beautiful relation between hero and people to an insistence, in the face of the loss of that relation, on virtue, intelligence, and manners because they are our best ways of accepting that loss. The great heroes of the past die well by dying bravely, while Alice can only ask the White Queen, laughing "even in the midst

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of her tears," "Can you keep from crying by considering things?" The splendor of Empson's book is that it can show the narrowing of feeling that accompanied change without falling into nostalgia itself, without distorting the works by blurring their dissimilarities, without anything less than complicated and generous praise for the works that allow Empson to know the history that made him who he was and is.

Having insisted on the unfolding unity of the book, one can easily agree that some essays are better than others. "Marvell's Garden" and "Alice in Wonderland" are the ones usually taken out for anthologies, but good as they are, they do seem special and willfully intricate out of context. The most satisfactory detachable essay is on *The Beggar's Opera*. Its argument is quite self-contained, its movement is straightforward, its fifty-five pages of probing are almost unmarred by eccentricity or stylistic blemish, and it has the neat definitions of Comic Primness which are detachable and workable on many different works. By comparison, "Double Plots" and "They That Have Power" suffer because they try to do too much merely by suggestion. But they are great quarries and as such are superior to "Milton and Bentley," which is not only bad in ways shown by Adams but also contorted because Empson was not yet ready to say what he thought *Paradise Lost* is all about.

At this point Empson evidently felt he had to go back and write the same history over again from a different point of view. The book on pastoral had to stress the swains and so was forced to deal with works where the language is sufficiently heightened to give the hero symbolic stature. The method left out a good deal and had to gain its sense of "the people" primarily by implication. So Empson turned to the people via the complex word—dog, honest, sense, and fool—which took the idea of ambiguity and moved it from something inherent in the poetic language to something expressive of a relation between author and audience. The result is a demonstration of the way language really used by men can really be used greatly by great writers. His fullest statement of his claims comes at the end of a fine chapter on "The English Dog":

> It is surely a striking reflection that a great deal of the thought of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> man like Dr. Johnson, and probably the parts of his thought which are by this time most seriously and rightly admired, were not carried on his official verbal machinery but on colloquial phrases like the one about dogs; phrases that he would have refused to analyse on grounds of dignity even if he had been able to. No doubt you need to know a great many other things before you can understand the working of a society; but there is a claim to be made for that branch of study I am touching on here. You need to know, as well as the serious opinions of a man in the society, how much weight he would allow, when making a practical decision, to some odd little class of joke phrases, such as excite, he would feel, sentiments obvious to any agreeable person, and yet such as carry doctrines more really complex than the whole structure of his official view of the world. *(p. 174)*

We should remember that these essays were written when the Elizabethan World Picture and the New Philosophy were forcing the great Renaissance writers into traditional and uninteresting molds. As he settled himself as an historian, Empson found the field occupied by men like C. S. Lewis, E. M. W. Tillyard, Dover Wilson, Basil Willey, and A. O. Lovejoy. He must have tasted a certain relish in crossing swords with them and in trying to show how rich are Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, and Pope beside the pallid chroniclers of the official into which they were being transformed.

But this committed Empson to a strategy of implied antagonism and this, in turn, committed him to the kind of byplay that ended up making *Complex Words* so much longer than *Pastoral*. The most characteristic form of such play is the filling in with novelistic details of the way someone or a whole class of people felt two centuries ago:

> Many of the audience [of *Othello*] were old soldiers disbanded without pension; they would dislike Cassio as the new type of officer, the boy who can displace men of experience merely because he knows enough mathematics to work the new guns. *(p. 229)*

This kind of thing is lovely fun, and the later essays that reply to Dover Wilson's Shakespeare contain some of the best gamesmanship available. Empson reconstructs a debate among the members of the Globe management about where to put the bed in the scene in Gertrude's closet and offers a marvelous account of how drunk the same group would have to be to have mislaid, as Wil-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

son claimed, an uncut version of *Macbeth* while performing a cut version at court.[6]

The objection to this should not be that Empson takes all this seriously, although he does at times. Usually, though, he keeps his sense of play and he seldom rests his case on his ability to make schoolboy's anecdotes out of a handful of details. The objection is that while engaged in all this Empson often overlooks matters of considerable importance to his argument; typically, he ignores the narrative. In the earlier books Empson's desire to forget the story is bypassed by working with poems and short passages from longer books. But in *Complex Words*, especially in dealing with Shakespearean tragedy where the position of a speech is often as crucial as its words, the problems become more complicated. Empson is willing to speak of the context surrounding a passage, and he is often wonderful at showing how one speech can pick up and focus previous ones. But for him "story" usually means "plot" in the narrowest of ways, that is, the little fictional details well hidden from ordinary view that he likes to pick up and turn around so he can claim he is attending to the narrative. But only in the essays on *Measure for Measure* and *Lear* does he really attend to the story, and it is hardly coincidence that these are the best things in the book.

For almost always the relation between artist and audience is tied up with understandings the two make about the conduct of the story, and so an historian of this relation cannot afford to ignore the way a work unfolds. Nowhere is this clearer than in the dazzling essay on "Sense in *Measure for Measure*," which arranges itself in patterns dictated by Shakespeare's narrative. Here is the opening:

> There are only about ten uses of the word [sense] in the play, but I think almost all of them carry forward a puzzle which is essential to its thought. It is not denied that the word then covered (1) "sensuality" and (2) "sensibility," and I maintain that it also covered (3) "sensibleness," though in a less direct way. . . . Clearly the equations between the three could carry very relevant ironies, though the effect is not so much a covet assertion as something best translated into questions. Are Puritans hard? (Is not-one not-two?) Are they liable to have crazy outbreaks? (Is not-one not-three?) Is mere justice enough? (Is three two?) *(p. 270)*

[6] See "Dover Wilson on Macbeth," *Kenyon Review*, XIV (1952), 84-102; "Hamlet When New," *Sewanee Review*, LXI (1953), 15-42, 185-205; "Falstaff and Mr. Dover Wilson," *Kenyon Review*, XV (1953), 213-262.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Put this way it matters very little whether the O. E. D. will sanction Empson's definitions or whether Shakespeare can be imagined to sanction or invite Empson's questions; what is important is the way the three questions raise the key questions of the play in the order the play raises them. Before he is halfway through his first paragraph, he is ready to crack the play wide open so that the uses of "sense" not only show "an examination of sanity itself" in the spectre of Angelo's fall but also lead right into all the problems raised by the Duke after he begins to tighten the reins in Act III. Here Empson shows how multiple a word, and an idea, can be at the moment it and the culture behind it are reaching a crisis, fumbling in its usage and revealing to a sensitive author unique ways of expressing the crisis. It is not, thus, idle to think that a great work yet to be written will show how much complexity lies behind our present uses of the words "real" and "human," words that have become almost antonyms. At his best Empson knows exactly how far his exploration of a word can take him and how much he can claim his reading is a whole reading. But still, he is narrowing himself to a special field of study here and his very geniality and gamesmanship seem to have prevented him from seeing it. The whole idea of complex words depends, if used for other than narrowly historical purposes, on authors phenomenally responsive to spoken language, as Shakespeare, Pope, and Wordsworth were. Kenner said in his review that "one suspects that the word 'dead' in *The Waste Land* would give trouble, the word 'city' a great deal more, and the 'broken Coriolanus' near the end of the poem would wreck the machinery entirely." He is right, and poems better even than *The Waste Land* would reveal greater shortcomings. Empson must steer clear of poets like Blake and Spenser, about whom on other terms he might have said wondrous things. But *Paradise Lost* was too much to resist.

For Christ has always been The Hero for Empson, and, as the first pages of *Milton's God* make clear, the reason is that the Christian God is malicious and wicked, capable of torturing His Son and of insisting that such torture is only a part of His love. It is the human suffering of Jesus that moves Empson, the way he creates the possibility of society by being outcast from both man and God. God casts out Christ and offers him for sacrifice,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thereby making Jesus' suffering human. Jesus accepts this humanity even as man casts him out, and in taking on the sins of the world he makes his heroic affirmation by accepting and forgiving its cruelty, while he simultaneously insists on the common humanity of all because all are outcast from God. To paraphrase his key sentence about Milton, Empson praises Jesus because he is willing to make God seem so bad. This idea is totally unliterary, however, and in criticism it probably belongs where it is placed in *Some Versions of Pastoral,* at a distance. But there is no Christ in Milton's poem, only a pale Son placed beside a vivid and unpleasant God, so it will not be a member of the Trinity but Adam and Eve who are sacrificed on Empson's reading of the poem. It is almost inevitable that Empson make Milton of Empson's party without really knowing it. To convince his readers he is talking about the poem and not about himself is a task worthy of all his wiles, jokes, acumen, and bravado, and he solved the problem as he imagined Shakespeare solving the problem of Hamlet's delay—"the only way to shut this hole is to make it big." So he confesses his bias at the beginning and insists he is terribly interested in the narrative when in fact all he cares about is obscure details of the plot. He then substitutes a narrative of his own for Milton's, making a novel himself as intricate as one of Henry James's, then casually throws us off that scent by insisting in a few asides that James's novels are all muddles. But so is his, beautifully hidden under a breezy tone. To use one of his favorite words, *Milton's God* is a wicked book.

But it is invaluable as well, because the book that really refutes Empson's will have to be a superlatively good book. It is easy to know that Empson is being perverse when he speaks continually of "God's blood-curdling jokes," because it is easy to believe that Milton would have been furious at such a phrase. But how we answer Empson is important. For instance, Empson finds one joke by beginning with a sentence of Eliot's:

> To complain, because we first find the arch-fiend "chained on the burning lake," and in a minute or two see him making his way to the shore, is to expect a kind of consistency which the world to which Milton has introduced us does not require.

Empson comments:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Imagism seems to me such nonsense that I cannot guess what may be decided by its rules, but Milton tells us at once that God deliberately released Satan from his chains. The first words of God in the poem, however, which come in Book III, imply that he didn't; and the only way to explain this later passage is to regard it as one of God's blood-curdling jokes. *(p.29)*

Empson is perfectly right about the details; in Book I Milton does say the "high permission of all-ruling Heaven/ Let him at large" and in Book III God does speak of Satan as "our adversary, whom no bounds/ Prescrib'd." It would be quite just to call this a joke on God's part if we were to insist that Milton has imagined a fictional and theological world in which the details all fit. Most critics have imagined Milton was creating such a world, in which case Milton has nodded or God has made a joke. But if we correct Eliot's errors in detail and follow his lead, we can see that Milton often does not strive for the kind of consistency that a comparison of the two passages implies. They really are like two ends of a telescope; when we are in Hell and Milton wants Satan grand and far from God, he also wants to show that seeing Satan this way is only a problem in perspective, and when we are in Heaven Milton wants to make Satan seem puny and laughable. That is, he writes to fit his rhetorical needs and not to create a fictional world, and if we once ignore this Empson is upon us, insisting that God is wicked, showing us the inevitable consequences of relaxing our attention even for a moment.

He says, for instance, near the beginning that "Milton regularly presents a fall as due to an intellectually interesting temptation, such that a cool judge may feel actual doubt whether the fall was not the best thing to do in the circumstances." This seems pleasantly generous to Milton and so we may be inclined to assent, knowing as we do that the fall of Adam and Eve was such that we might judge it the best thing to have happened. But to present this idea as part of a programme for going through the poem in sequence is simply not to read, as the very first passage about Satan makes clear:

> Him the Almighty Power
> Hurled headlong flaming from th' Ethereal Sky
> With hideous ruin and combustion down
> To bottomless perdition, there to dwell

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In adamantine Chains and penal Fire,
Who durst defy the Omnipotent to Arms. (*I, 44-49*)

Nothing could be further from that passage than "a fall as due to an intellectually interesting temptation," and if you really start at the beginning of the poem nothing could be more decisive. Of course this is not Milton's only tone, and problems do arise about Satan's original fall and God's plan which at moments make God seem as malicious as Empson says. But Empson's elaborate reconstruction of the events from the beginning, all about a meeting for Senior Angels and Satan's calculations before his troops, is only partly relevant to the story considered as the sequence Milton creates. Thus to equate sequence and plot is to rob Milton of his rhetorical requirements, which is to take his poetry away from him, and so the book very seldom deals first hand with the text and is happy to provide a paraphrase and work with that. So we have some details, some theological probings, and some very funny ways of dealing with the opposing critical side. To say Satan's stunning first speech reveals "an impressive degree of sincerity in a politician" is a fine retort to those who think Satan is simply the Father of Lies, but neither Empson nor the Christian apologists are really looking at the speech. Thus C. S. Lewis is a good adversary for Empson because he too has such an easy view of the poetry.

To be willing to become an adversary of C. S. Lewis, though, is to come down a long way. Of course Derek Traversi should not be allowed to be our expert on Shakespeare, Miss Tuve should not be our scholar for Renaissance poetry, Lewis should not be our voice for Milton's epic. Of course, too, to expand our sense of what Empson is fighting against even in *Milton's God,* literature must not be allowed to become only a document, a text, a sacred relic; for when it is, our insistence on "reading historically" usually becomes a substitute for reading. Other historians besides Empson know how much our history is merely our own, but no other historian of literature has seen so thoroughly how history, because it *can* only be, *must* certainly only be a way of knowing ourselves by making poems be alive for us.

But still, *Complex Words* and *Milton's God* do show how much Empson is willing to sacrifice in order to keep himself alive, and to find terms for a final estimate we must go back to a poem

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Empson wrote during the period he was writing *Some Versions of Pastoral*. "Aubade" is about two lovers who find themselves in an impending revolution and so must part. It works with two repeated lines, "It seemed the best thing to be up and go," and "The heart of standing is we cannot fly." Early in the poem the lines do not quite fit with each other or the other lines, but gradually they are brought together until, in the last stanza, we have this:

> But as to risings, I can tell you why.
> It is on contradiction that they grow.
> It seemed the best thing to be up and go.
> Up was the heartening and the strong reply.
> The heart of standing is we cannot fly.

The details finally fuse, as they do after similar apparent wandering in the book on pastoral. The "risings" are double: first, revolutions rise because men are bored and angry at being able to do nothing; second, we rise up and go, because the revolutions rise and there is no place for our love. Thus, "it is on contradiction that they grow." "Up was the heartening and the strong reply," then, refers both to the cry of the revolutionaries and to the reply the man gives the girl: we must part for there is no place to go, "The heart of standing is we cannot fly." Going and staying become, thus, the same because the wry, generous voice which accepts history and circumstance can express this acceptance as a simple matter of physics: we cannot fly.

But in the context of his whole work, this vision is not simply the matter of a lyric. From his knowledge of history, which led so completely to an awareness that we cannot fly, Empson did not retreat. He led no movement to the Church or to the simplifying arenas of politics or the academic study of literature, and I dare say he has written as he has because he is not sure if there is anyone to hear him. He had to find his strength in the idea that a limited audience could only be, like virtue and good manners, another reflection of the inadequacy of human conditions and of the isolation even of a life rich in intimacy. But in confessing such limits Empson discovered not only the heart of where he himself stands but the heart of the whole idea of literary stance. So, for many of the "some things" that matter most, he is the first critic in the world.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LINCOLN KIRSTEIN

Western

Connecticut's a suburb to suburbs, leached its land,
A final stage;
Our 'young' nation's archaic area; on every hand
Arthritic age:
Colonial relics; ecological signs read
THE SCOTTS LIVE HERE,
In a barn rehashed as a ranch-house for settlers whose mean seed
Stock this frontier.

THE SCOTTS: Burt, Marybeth, two girls and a no-neck thing.
Both girls are bright.
Mary's married, Beth's at Bryn Mawr, but as for their least sibling,
The boy's not right,—
Past the age of consent, hebephrenic, soiled, fat, bald,
Bruin forlorn:
Conception, gestation normal,—yet maturity mauled
Burt Scott's firstborn.

He's had good doctors, world-famous specialists. The lot
Guessed as they could
But found neither germ, reason nor ethic. What's misbegot
Plods a parched wood.
Forest coëval, poison ivy, ragweed, black birch,
Stripped top-soil base;
Harvest for gypsy-moth, cut-worm. Crows diagnose his lurch:
Outpatient case.

He mushes towards town, gas-station, superette, drug-store,—
Panhandling troll,
Howling hit-tunes, his hymns abstracted from TV folklore
Out of control.
Bulldozers buzz his poor path, evict moles, mice, raccoons.
Chipmunks, rabbits
Retreat from their roosts bewitched by his pied-piper tunes
And bad habits,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His slobber, his slump. In drug-store glow local cow-hands'
Cosmetic tans,
Azure jeans, smug, clean. Jovial delinquents sip standard brands;
Shun Caliban's;
Can't they corral him at home, hog-tie such infection,
Not foul our nest?
Kids crowd their counter; quaff no-cal cokes, clannish protection,
Cool alkahest.

An halfbreed begs from his betters one comfortless word;
He'd join their tribe,—
Sheriffs who, on maverick or moron, ride their hard herd.
He brings them bribe,
Beats 'em all to the draw, on a beast, his kill. Its hulk
Blunt, abridged too,—
Flushed from a freshly dozed field, an earnest of skill; its bulk
Bulldozers slew.

Junior, bronc-buster and odd-ball punch-drunkenly gropes
"The Last Chance Bar";
Slings on its top a putrid dead skunk. Our Lone Ranger lopes
Where Good Guys are.
Bang bang. Now, a druggist, The Villain, roars up. Boss, he
Lassooes this steer;
Hurls its haul to the dust. Scott is, bucking a full posse,
Chucked on his ear.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, the Burt Scotts verify
Their day's nightmare,—
Scotty overdue,—waiting his serial alibi,
Bored by despair.

Bar & Grill

So they meet
By the pleas of paid lawyers, on neutral ground,
In "The Ship's Lantern Bar & Grill."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When she enters, he's fuming, seated and looming
Confident,—Actively passive, assuming
At the ready, triggered: his will.

Can any
Viable area of agreement be found?
She'll act as if they're still married
Nor will he bother to rise. She grins, at her least;
His nod assigns her a seat, rude foretaste to feast
Of fist-fight, each bitty bite parried.

First problem,
Quick liquor: martini or bloody-mary?
Well he knows her fav'rite cocktail
But tonight there's no question what one might enjoy.
It's who packs a first punch to recapture The Boy;
His forte: main force. Hers: shy blackmail.

Keeping it
Close as can be to their customary,
"Martoonies," she drily implores.
"Bloody-marys," (ice-cube eyes). "This is My dinner."
She feints, powder dry: "Why, Bill. You do Look, thinner,"
Sparring, to sidestep old or new scores.

Flattery
Cuts no ice. He digests a tattered menu.
Waitress waits, a slack referee.
"Onion soup, sauerbraten, chocolate parfait."
"And the lady?" "The same." First round,—his; all the way.
Fast start; any bets? She'll wait and see.

"How's Billy?"
Before continuance of this interview
Steams in onion soup. Cheeze, or not?
He snaps: "No cheeze." She lisps: "Cheeze, please, and I mean: please."
Very well. Cheeze. Their waitress feels both clients freeze
Chilling excellent broth she'd brought, hot.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This gets us
Nowhere, She ducks. His footwork shan't equal hers:
"Billy's *fine*. He sends you his: love."
Oh, does he? Hell of a note. Her blow is,—felt.
"Now let me tell You . . ." He's been fouled, below the belt.
His gut? No. His heart, one inch above.

"That young man's
Got to grow Up. He's wasting his Time. What's worse,
You're turning him into a Case."
I am not. Oh yes you are. Sauerbraten's nutritious
When gastric juice works. Bile, gall, hate distil vicious
Gas. One could catch ptomaine in this place.

"Listen, Bill.
He's only thirteen. Give the poor child a chance;
It is a sensitive kid.
Let him develop his Own personality. . . ."
Aw doan try an pull that ole crap on Me.
He's hit hard at her opening bid.

Bread and salt
Both forgot, here's an end to toothsome romance;
Famished, each seeks a swift slaughter.
Male, his aims for an heir are welter-weight lofty;
He'll chew his cub tough from the bones of a softy;
A manchild's his due, no mere daughter.

The killer
Menaces her who once was, his legal wife,
Who is, about fed up with him:
"You Shut Up. Billy's Mine. I came here to be nice";
Summons steel from her womb which may still not suffice;
She stalls, hauling him out on a limb

To lop him
Off. Will he let her? The Story Of His Life,
Of both lives, embroiling a son
Already ripe for psychiatric attention

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

With lush, high-seasoned trauma needless to mention
Since the doctors' bills haven't begun.

That waitress
Disguised as social-worker, nun, nurse's aid,
Judging our clamped ravenous pair
Regrets fair food untouched, far above the melée:
Tepid meat, gelid sauce, twin melting parfaits.
How can they bear to sit staring there?

Deadlock can't
Last. Something's got to give. Caught short, she's betrayed.
Her empty tummy jumps. She's sick.
She flees. Knockout. Surprised by her treacherous haste
He sniffs cool broken orts. To eliminate waste
Cleans his plate and hers, lick after lick.

Dead On Arrival

How did it all start to stop: Here?
Can we compute waste,
Swerved from a breezy predictable main track,
Thus, out of whack,
Stark stiff, puddling a rubber sheet? Fear
Stacks morgues, its savor a tart foretaste
Of what's in store for our more elegant bier.

Cops; tripe, spleen. Jesus. Facts follow
Dogging this stale dawn.
They're nobody's guess. Through slab, stodgy, slate hours
Courage cowers.
He's solid. We live ones are hollows
Sweating, to fill his gap with a yawn
Or, sampling meat cooled for keeps, hard swallows.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Shallow fellow. He drove. He drank.
Rage? Crisis? Despair?
This simple son of a bitch couldn't care less
For his fine mess.
Behold him, breathless, selfless, to thank
God who, so far, hasn't plugged us where
A sawed-off steering wheel kerplunked him point-blank.

Remotely I knew this mad man,
Not ever as 'friend'.
Mayhap we'd collide at gas-pump or drug-store:
Glazed sophomore,—
Huge cuff-links, blazer, loafers, man-tan;
Store-bought manners too mingy to mend
His Jaguar scratched as a slow also-ran.

Parkways at night, drilled by iced rain.
We're all well advised.
Luminoid signs spotlight: SLIPPERY WHEN WET.
All can read, yet,
Red-eyed, bleary-eyed; overwork strain,
Straight bourbon aged smooth, as advertised,
Wrecked a mortal de luxe divine scatterbrain.

Windshield wiper tick-tocks. Road's slick.
Skimming last year's crates
His late model clicks by, a bat out of hell.
He drove quite well
Sober. Stoned,—goony gone lunatic.
Hi-test gas, great in jets, detonates,
Brag double-page spreads, with a tiger-tank's kick.

"Does anyone know," cops query,
"Who this dumb guy is?"
I can fill in two names and a rough address;
Am billed witness.
Strangers in life, here's leave to marry.
Leaves no survivors he can call his.
Next nasty job, mop up and bury.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He'd had three fair wives, four cute kids
In the Post-War years.
What happens? Jostling divorce; each spouse
untrue;
Infants withdrew.
In Big Advertising, on the skids:
"Brilliant. Unstable." This wizard hears
He's lost his last fat account. No new bids.

When he was slimmed, dauntless, erect,
We'd little to say.
Supine, here ferments to a far cry of kin,
Yet genuine,
Both loafers flung clear. Cousin,—connect!
Ten toes in socks hauled on yesterday,
Half nylon, half wool,—gashed, surplus, suspect.

His hands, his brains; his footless death.
Unnecessary.
Rich junk he sold dear to make it more wanted.
Man is daunted
By products lacking lustre or breath.
Singing-commercial's obituary:
So, what the hell. Grass is? As the Psalmist saith.

LAURENCE LIEBERMAN

Santana

The usual hazards seem to be worse this fall:
the Santana gales
escalate, in moments, massive bales
of tumbleweed like giant eagles' nests, uptorn,
and stampeding over the mesa. Some few seem to crawl

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in and out of the steep ravine ditch,
to rise again in blurred puffs like unshorn
sheep, and leap the cyclone fence
as into my yard they pitch.
I, at my patio door, engulfed in trance.

This morning, dust in the kitchen's a half-inch thick.
The Los Angeles fire—
storm rages wider and higher,
devouring scores of acres of timber per minute
and as many Hollywood homes in an hour—that quick!
I stand at the doorstep. A newspaper cyclone
(the delivery boy hardly thought to begin it)
commences. The children whip by on skates. They stretch
pieces of sheeting for sails.
My neighbor prays they'll postpone
the nuclear war till his fallout shelter is finished.

(Each temblor and sonic boom wrests him with panic.)
He fumes after the grey
wide antiseptic garbage truck, sway-
ing in the wind like a female hippopotamus
in heat, its trail, the aftermath of a manic-
depressive: corrugated cans and their contents strewn
all about. (In the hands of an ignoramus
or two at the heads of State rests
the instantaneous fate of three billion human
lives. The harmless shapes of my domestic chaos suggest

that horror.) I find myself bounding across the lawn
in pursuit of a runaway
tricycle. From between my legs, with a display
of chagrin, emerges its huffing owner who unbalances
the would-be rescuer, and barely escapes being sat on
in the ensuing collapse. Before I'm back on my feet,
seven cartons blow past. What are the chances
for survival? A shake of the dice.
I reach in all directions at once, but end in defeat.
Let the wind take all. My breath has turned to ice.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Owls

Owls
Help us to dream.
They enter our sleeping heads
And hoot. They drop some feathers. (We blame
Them on our pillows.) They call to the dead in their shrouds.
That is all. They slip from our sleep, and return to their tree-holes.
The eyes that stare back at you are not bats or toads.
Roosting in the tree's hollow, a tomb
In the trunk, the sultans of mood
Sulk. Tree-gloom
Moles?

Perhaps.
But they don't burrow.
They dream of moonlight, not dirt.
It takes them years to learn to mellow
And to sustain an erect dignity when they fart.
They stare. Their eyes are always open and don't need drops.
Compared to how old they think, their lives are short.
They sink deep in themselves. Not shallow,
They toil to remain alert,
But will not follow
Maps

Or clocks.
In the owl mind's-eye
The lion's roar is a cough,
The whale a goldfish in the bowl of sea,
The python's crush tickles, not firm enough
To choke the lamb, the eagle cannot scale high rocks,
The bear won't hug, nor does the hyena laugh;
All creatures halt in their lives to pray
For grace. If they do not bluff,
The owl mind's-eye
Unlocks.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tarpon

Five shadows in heavy motion, lumbering half-seen,
pass me on either side, shark
panic slowly leaving my fluttered breath pumping as I make

out the Tarpons' armored plate scales,
diamonded in silvery weave, the undershot bulldog
jaw, his thick cylindrical body,

a wingless fuselage, famed for muscling twelve foot
leaps in the air on his tail's pole
vault—when hooked, and broadjumping thirty feet at a bolt,

many times, in Kodak-flash succession.
Now some thirty tarpon pass, in clusters of three to six.
Still mindful of shark fins, I half-spin

radially, peering from side to side, with metronomic
evenness of rhythm, kicking to and fro
to sustain a stable axis of pivot, the only way to keep

from drifting blindly out of shore's safe
keeping, my attention fastened undivertedly to the man-sized
passersby. I scrutinize the larger specimens,

ruling out the offchance of a lone predator, prowling.
I take heart finally, as the school thins
out, a few last (three foot!) small fry trailing behind,

solitarily, one pausing just under my legs,
looking after the others, and up at me disconcertedly,
finally edging up to my spear for a closer

view . . . a being more innocent, quiet, curious—more frail
than myself. My hand, before my very eyes,
puts down claws: all the violence I so dreaded to find,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moments before, in a fancied pursuer, now
surging in my arm, up my back and neck, and finally,
shaking my eyes in my skull like false

teeth in a cup. I hang back. The loaded speargun,
its three rubbers taut for release,
jiggles between us, seemingly playful, fish-chumming

away the tarpon's caution, a kinship
springing up between us; my hand still shaking its fury,
become a strange brute thing, self-motived,

disengaged, yet clinging still to my wrist, tugging
at my joints as a mad dog on a leash,
yearning for a sickening engagement: *my eyes fix*

on a point above his head, drilling in.
A brain shot would yank him up, so much limp flesh
hung on a spit; a tail shot implode

all fierceness inside him, our two nerve cords thrown
into a queer freedom of naked contact,
as though our bodies had fallen away, and the nerves

danced and leapt and wound about each
other like quivering vines. . . . I have been here before.
I have dreamed the death of friends, died

in a friend's dream, and come back. For love, I could
kill, or be killed. I'll always return,
as a fish perhaps, as myself turned fish. Fish-friend,

I drop my spear. All terror, love, thee
I spare, who can tow a twenty foot sailing smack
for hours, or twist and snap a heavy

duty wrought iron spear like a pretzel, or tug
an all-fated spearfisherman to breath-
less lung-forfeiting depths. . . In seconds flat.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SAMUEL L. ALBERT

Letters to Phyllis

I

Phyllis, tonight at 7:30 I prayed to a new god
Dropped on my knees instinctively there in New York
Before all the lighted airy windows forty stories high.

Phyllis, you must come down here at once.
The windows at Saks, the displays at Tiffany's.
The toys at F.A.O.'s, and the silver at Jensen's.

And I heard the all male choir sing at K.L.M.
The Dutch Airline—all dressed in coat and tails
And I tell you, Phyllis, you must come down.

You know, also, Phyllis, the entrance to the Savoy
Or take any part of Park Avenue and the doormen there
And the everything going up higher and higher.

The Tishman, the Union Carbide, 375 Park Avenue.
It's too much for me alone.
You must come down, Phyllis.

II

Please Phyllis,
You know the most beautiful women
Live in New York, you know that.
You told me that yourself,
You did, did you not?

Nowhere does their charm show more
Than in a city built of glass and neon,
And you would think they are built the same

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And yet no they are not and yes they are
Like any smartest animal in the wood.
For animal in the wood is blend and blonde
Or dark if necessarily dark is necessary;
And these are they
Being what they are and where they live
Because they have to be to be, and just as naturally.

And they are beautiful against a building
Or any part of the city where they naturally live.
The city is their habitat.
Be careful how you feed them.
Naturally, Phyllis.

Times Square

You can only take in spurts
Like half an hour, this.
You leave the room and down the hall
Then down the stairs and out.

But what an out!
Like half of girls and what with man
And all the air is steeped in stuff
With smells of food and fleeting cabs.

And face of buildings halved with ties
Like parts of studded shoes the same
And streets are valleys full of peaks
While 'walk' and 'don't walk' call your name.

How much of this that you can take
Like half as much and much of more
You cannot say nor cannot stay
But must come back and close the door.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

D. M. PETTINELLA

Translations from Montale

LEMON TREES

Listen to me, the laureate poets
only move among plants
with rarely used names: boxwood, privet or acanthus
I, myself, love the roads that break through grassy ditches in whose half-dried
puddles, boys grab
a skinny eel:
the narrow roads that follow ridges
descending through clumps of sugar cane
and breaking out into orchards among lemon trees.

Better if the uproar of the birds
is spent and absorbed in the blue:
one can hear better the murmur
of friendly boughs in the almost motionless air,
and this sentient fragrance
helplessly clinging to the ground
pours unquiet sweetness in our breasts.
From diverted passions, the war here
is miraculously silent,
and we, too, poor derelicts, are given our share of riches,
the fragrance of the lemons.
In these silences, where things
lie forsaken and seem about
to betray their ultimate secret,
at times we expect
to discover an error of Nature,
the dead spot of the earth, the broken link,
the thread to untangle which finally places us
in the midst of some truth.
Eyes search around
mind delves condones disjoins
in the spreading fragrance

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the languishing day.
These are silences in which one sees
some disturbed Divinity
in every disappearing human shadow.

But illusion fails and time brings us back
to the noisy cities where the blue
lies only in patches, high, among the rooftops.
Then rain fatigues the land; the tedium
of winter falls thick on all the houses,
the light grows meagre, the soul becomes bitter.
When one day from a half open gate
we see the yellows of the lemons
among the courtyard trees;
the gelid heart melts
in our breasts
their songs bursting
from golden bugles of sunlight.

ENGLISH HORN

Wind attentively playing tonight
—recalls violent brandishings of steel blades—
weapons of serried trees sweeping
the copper horizon
where ribbons of light as kites
stretch out in the resounding sky.
(Traveling clouds, clear
realms of the heights! Tall Eldoradoes,
ill-shut doors!)
And the livid sea, bit
by bit, changing color
flings a horn of twisted foam
on the beach;
may the wind rising
and dying in the slow hour of dusk
play on you, too, tonight,
unstrung instrument,
the heart.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE WELL'S PULLEY CREAKS

The well's pulley creaks,
rising water fuses in light.
Memories waver in the overflowing bucket,
an image smiles in the clear pool.
My face draws close to vanishing lips;
the past disintegrates, grows old,
belongs to someone else. . .
Ah! The wheel
creaks again, brings you down to dark depths,
vision, we are divided by distance.

TOWARDS CAPUA

. . . breaking the road's bend with one leap,
the Volturno slumped, yellow, high tide
flooding the heath, dispersing
into clay pits. Below, along the hedges
the mobile outline of a post chaise
with horses appeared
in a wake of dust and bells.
It halted a few moments, the crew
jolting, minute butterflies
swarming round it. A furtive
sunbeam suddenly enflamed the grove
of stripped corks, the coach laboring
heavily began to leave; while at road's end,
you waved a scarf for a long moment, starry
flag, the greedy river sinking in the sand.

ALONG THE SEASHORE

Wind grows, darkness breaks to shreds,
the shadow you cast over the frail
pile-fence curls. Too late

if you wish to be yourself! The mouse
falls heavily from the palm tree; lightning strikes
the fuse over your long long lashes when you look.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CALVIN BEDIENT

The Radicalism of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

I

In general, Lawrence's critics emasculate him. His execrations and outcries come out as poems, his fanaticism as wisdom, his love-hatred of life as unambivalent affirmation, his anti-individualism as the ultimate in reverence for the individual, his ceaseless conceptualization of being as healthy anti-intellectualism, and his militant, revolutionary salvationism as social amelioration. Witness this process of disembarrassment as one of Lawrence's most recent critics, Julian Moynahan, closes his discussion of *Lady Chatterley's Lover:*

> He [Lawrence] did not want men of the twentieth century to don white jackets and scarlet trousers pulled tight across the buttocks. But he did want men and women of the "tragic age" to look at themselves and to raise the question of whether the tragic view of man's plight took full account of creative human possibilities. He wanted us to look to our maturity and to consider whether it did not become for some people a mask concealing deadness.[1]

To raise the question! Whether! Full Account! For some people! It is all so very reasonable, moderate, and innocuous, like an armchair exercise for introspective professors. But it is not Lawrence.

The most ironic and astonishing instance of such denaturing took place during the British trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover.* Needless to say, the book is nothing like obscene, and should not have been tried; also needless to say, in view of the result, the witnesses did well by Lawrence; but not one of the persons of outstanding mind and education who testified for *Lady Chatterley's Lover* seemed aware that, by doing so, they were testifying against themselves—that is, against persons as such, their own education and cultivation of mind, and "our maturity," all of which the novel condemns. It is a beautiful though perhaps predictable irony that the book was dragged to trial precisely through

[1]Julian Moynahan, *The Deed of Life* (Princeton University Press, 1963).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sort of mechanization of means, the anarchic autonomy of process, against which it so movingly and damningly protests. Which then was on trial, the court or the novel? Yet, assuming that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* should have been brought to jury and judgment at all, surely it faced the wrong charge. Though it is not pornographic, it is subversive. In 1954, during the trial of another novel, Mr. Justice Devlin said:

> Just as loyalty is one of the things which is essential to the well-being of a nation, so some sense of morality is . . . essential to the well-being of a nation, and to the healthy life of the community, and accordingly, anyone who seeks by his writing to corrupt that fundamental sense of morality is guilty of obscene libel.

Judging by these terms, by the national morality, what is Lawrence's novel if not immoral? Not that it means to corrupt, exactly, the fundamental sense of British morality, whether of 1928 or any other time. On the contrary, it means to eradicate the sense of morality altogether—to exclude from experience the conceptualization and codification of good and evil. Quite obviously, what Lawrence "wanted," to return to Mr. Moynahan, was to lead us back, back to the far side of man's "excursion into ideals, bodilessness, and tragedy"; back to a world where neither Parliaments, *Reginae,* Justices, nor Doctors of Literature, for instance, would exist or be called for, in "a lovely, lovely life in the lovely universe, the life of the human body."

II

One way of approaching the ambiguities of the book, of discovering, beneath its "love story," the Lawrencian explosive, is to consider the appropriateness of its three projected titles: *Tenderness;* Lawrence's final choice, *John Thomas and Lady Jane;* and his publishers' preference, *Lady Chatterley's Lover.* As it happens, in each case the appropriateness is ambiguous—a sign of the novel's relative richness in the Lawrence canon.

Of the three titles, *Tenderness* is perhaps preferable. The tenderness of this book, so overwhelming, so surprising in view of the earlier work, so perfect a gift from a dying man, is self-luminous, and not only aesthetic and physical, the overflow of delight, but human, born of compassion. It is an aesthetic tenderness, the grace and virtue of senses and of a sensibility open to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poetry of this world, that hears and reports "the tinkle as of tiny water-bells" of John's Well, that lingers over the first violets "that smelled sweet and cold, sweet and cold," that sees the daffodils "rustling and fluttering and shivering, so bright and alive," the "thick-clustered primroses no longer shy." And it is a tenderness of the body, the glow that radiates from the sense of touch, from the aroused blood, that warms many passages of the book. But what is new in the range of this tenderness—new enough to be revolutionary—is a quite human tenderness, that is, a moral one. Hitherto Lawrence had allowed in his scheme of salvation no place at all for Agape, for the milder Eros, for love not experienced "in extremity"—for a love that was not a strife between "polarities" but a corroboration and a celebration of being. But in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* he has brought together for the first time the two great streams of sensuality and affection. Compassion and passion become subtle translations of each other, as when Mellors, before the pheasant coops, seeing a tear fall onto Connie's wrist, "stood up, and stood away, moving to the other coop. For suddenly he was aware of the old flame shooting and leaping up in his loins, that he had hoped was quiescent for ever." It is a high moment in Lawrence's art, indeed in English literature, this moment of passionate tenderness; with St. Augustine, it says *I want you to be.*

It is Mellors, however, who says of "the Cliffords and Berthas":

> Tender to them? Yea, even then the tenderest thing you could do for them, perhaps, would be to give them death. They can't live. They only frustrate life. . . . Death ought to be sweet to them. And I ought to be allowed to shoot them.

This is the old, too-familiar Lawrencian arrogance—the arrogance that was so virulent a combination of egoism and fear of the world. Clifford himself later says of Mellors: "You'd wonder . . . that such beings were ever allowed to be born." Between the two, what is there to choose? And in quite a different way, the tenderness of the novel is complicated by the curiously belated, rather hollow, brief emphasis on the "piercing thrills of sensuality, different, sharper, more terrible than the thrills of tenderness. . . ." To Connie's dazed question, "But you'll keep the tenderness for me, won't you?" Mellors responds only by a kiss and a momentary embrace. Connie pities Hilda for having never known "either real

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tenderness or real sensuality"; and "the supreme pleasure of the mind," it is said, is nothing to "sheer fiery sensuality," which, in fact, is necessary "to purify and quicken the mind." All this is, I think, a willed, half-hearted, incomplete eruption into a novel not really particularly sympathetic to it of the old Lawrencian Eros, which was violent, extreme, and dehumanizing. Now, it is not the presence of the old deity here, but its discomfort, that is significant. Yet both the murderous lack of charity and the stress on *sheer* sensuality have a common root: Lawrence's fear and hatred of the individual *person*. And the continued, felt force in Lawrence's last novel of this abiding antipathy leads to the questions: Was Lawrence not right to want to call his novel *John Thomas and Lady Jane*? Or are Mellors and Connie, despite all, the true hero and heroine?

The expert witnesses at the British trial spoke of Lady Chatterley and her lover as one speaks of actual persons one has known—a tribute to the humanity of the work. Mr. Griffith-Jones, in the opening address for the prosecution, had sounded the challenge:

> It [the unexpurgated novel] goes on to give us a little, and you may think it gives us very little, about the characters of the people mentioned; the heroine, if I may so describe her, Lady Chatterley, and the hero, if I may so describe him, the gamekeeper, are, you may think, little more than bodies, bodies which continually have sexual intercourse with one another.

"Bodies which continually have sexual intercourse" is of course nonsense, and the tone of this puts one off. Still, was the witness who said, "I think . . . Connie Chatterley and Mellors . . . are extremely closely and intimately drawn," any nearer the truth? Or Mr. Gardiner of the defense when he spoke of the hero and heroine as being "in love" and of Lawrence's concern that men and women "re-establish personal relationships"? Or the witnesses who said, severally, that the book stresses "the real value and integrity of personal relations," that Lawrence intended to establish a "spiritual relationship between persons," that he tried "to tell the story of two people . . . and their personal feelings, and an attempt by these two people to break through into personal fulfillment," and that the novel recommends "a right and full relationship"? In a word, no. The vocabulary is all wrong—con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ventional and, in terms of the novel, outdated. Now, it was Lawrence who said, in *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover:* "We have abstracted men and women into separate personalities—personalities being isolated units, incapable of togetherness . . ."; who insisted that "the sex activity is . . . in some way hostile to the mental, *personal* relationship between man and woman"; who spoke of the ego, the assertive, identifying core of the *person,* as a "vile entity"; and who thought the "modern cult of personality" simply "fatal for marriage." What confused and misled the witnesses, I think, was the sheer novelty of Lawrence's enterprise: to write a pastoral tragi-comedy, a romance, not of human individuals, but of human *organisms.* The difference, in Lawrence's view, is decisive.

In the general, oversimplified polarity between the mechanical and the organic in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—as in all Lawrence—the personality, the personal, the mental are linked to the former and the body and its "emotions" (the only authentic emotions, according to Lawrence) to the latter. This is too obvious, on every page, to need documentation. It is precisely the opposite of the "quest for identity" characteristic of our own day, the anxious search for a coherent sense of self, that is exemplified first in Mellors and then also in Connie, who pursue, instead, anonymity of being. Since consciousness and names identify, they are eschewed. Connie, at first, is puzzled by Mellors' "queer, persistent wanting her, when there was nothing between them, when he never really spoke to her"; yet it was she who reflected earlier, in connection with a father for her wished-for child, "It was not a question of love; it was a question of *a man.* Why, one might even rather hate him, personally. . . . This business concerned another part of oneself." The sight of Mellors' body hits her in the impersonal "middle" of her own. She neglects to ask his name until late in the book. And just as he thinks of her as "the woman," she thinks of him simply as "the man."

> "He! He! What name do you call him by? You only say *he,*" said Hilda.
>
> "I've never called him by any name: nor he me: which is curious, when you come to think of it. Unless we say Lady Jane and John Thomas."

Being indeed a true "democracy of touch," a love of and for the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

body, Lawrencian love does not recognize persons. If all "soft, ruddy, country-looking" girls were equally capable of tenderness and surrender of self, would not all be equally desirable to Mellors? ". . . perhaps he wasn't quite individual enough," Connie reflects of him; "he might be the same with any woman. . . . It really wasn't personal. She was only really a female to him." But it is this impersonality that she learns to value: "She could feel in the same world with her the man, the nameless man, moving on beautiful feet, beautiful in the phallic mystery."

Lawrence exacts from Connie, as from his earlier heroines, obliteration of personality, in so far as she is to be the beloved—"Self! Self! Self!", especially in women, being the particular object both of Lawrence's and of Mellors' fear and hatred. Of the long description of one of her sexual experiences, ending ". . . the quick of all her plasm was touched. . . . She was gone, she was not, and she was born: a woman," Mr. Moynahan writes, in part: "The reader fails to achieve any deep realization of the sexual mystery and instead is liable to find himself stopping to ask questions about the plain prose meaning of such things as 'the quick of the plasm,' the statement that this woman has now become a woman (what was she a few moments earlier?), or the statement that at the height of the experience 'she was not.' " Yet the reader familiar with Lawrence ought to be able, without much trouble, to answer such questions, if only in Lawrence's own terms. The "quick" of the plasm is this vitalist's term for *sheer, essential being itself,* supposed resident of the blood; except when she becomes "a woman," Connie is, alas, a person; and as to being "gone," this is Lawrence's accustomed notation for the fact that consciousness—which to him, as to Sartre, is a form of nothingness—has given way to being. Connie the person *is not,* Connie the female *is.* The aim of such passages, as of the one which gives us Mellors, "Motionless, and in the invisible flame of another consciousness"—that is, of impersonal, and non-transcendent sentience—is to represent the "reality of peace" which issues from organic "togetherness." Peace is, indeed, the cardinal, ultimate object of desire in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—not love, not even tenderness, certainly not joy, but organic peace. And peace is gained only with escape from "the sense of menace and fear" that Lawrence associated always with "the feeling of individualism

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and personality." Individuality has, then, merely a negative value, and is to being what evil is to good.

Yet Mellors and Connie do come through as personalities—Connie so winsomely that, with Lawrence, our impulse is to call her Connie, not Constance or Lady Chatterley. And in the perspective of Lawrence's beliefs, there is in the novel an even more surprising triumph of what the author once called, patronizingly, "the old-fashioned human element": I mean those two scandalous, unique characters in distinguished English fiction, John Thomas and Lady Jane.

How unexpected, after the virulent, crackling rhetoric of such books as *The Plumed Serpent, Kangaroo, Women in Love,* this humanization of the sexual organs! For up to this point, to go with his "nonhuman people," Lawrence had propounded a queer, "electric," nonhuman sex, a dark passage into extremity—but now, into this lovely, warm lull, before the solemn sexual ponderosities of *The Man Who Died,* come humor, lightheartedness, erotic gaiety. Yet Mellors and Connie, though they are not, I think, quite forlorn, fall near to being so in nothing so much as this, that they come to seem secondary, even in their own eyes, to their sexual organs, which appear to have a fuller humanity than they themselves. Is Mellors weary of will, can he not tolerate Connie's? Never mind. John Thomas, admirable fellow, has a "will of his own." Mellors, again, may be sour, but John Thomas "comes up smilin'." And if Mellors' occupation is low, John Thomas is a "gentleman"—even knighted. And again, if Mellors and Connie cannot yet get married, John Thomas can marry Lady Jane:

> He fastened fluffy young oak-sprays round her breasts, sticking in tufts of bluebells and campion: and in her navel he poised a pink campion flower, and in her maiden-hair were forget-me-nots and woodruff.
>
> "That's you in all your glory!" he said. "Lady Jane, at her wedding with John Thomas."

This "lad," moreover, "cheeky" as he is, has in this novel the last word: "John Thomas says good night to Lady Jane, a little droopingly, but with a hopeful heart." The dehumanization of Mellors and Connie, then, is directly proportional to the humanization of their sexual organs. "This is John Thomas marryin' Lady Jane," Mellors says again. "An' we mun let Constance an' Oliver go their ways.'

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

III

Now, Lawrence's wish to de-create the ego *is* his radicalism, irreducible: everything else in his vision stems logically, sometimes not so logically, from this. As with the *person,* the vitalist has no interest in society *per se,* only in how it serves vitality; and of course nothing in culture is precious to him, neither science, art, morals, nor justice, the instant it comes to frustrate impulse or dim the dreamy, fluid, vivid, erotic perception of the world.

> The universe is dead for us, and how is it to come to life again? "Knowledge" has killed the sun, making it a ball of gas, with spots; "knowledge" has killed the moon . . . ; the machine has killed the earth for us. . . . How, out of all this, are we to get back the grand orbs of the soul's heavens, that fill us with unspeakable joy?

How, save by abolishing knowledge and machines? A certain subjective disposition, a way of knowing "in terms of togetherness, which is religious and poetic," the "oceanic feeling" the infant is supposed to know until his ego divides from the world, becomes in Lawrence the sole measure of beauty, goodness, and truth.

Lady Chatterley's Lover is, therefore, or would like to be, essentially a story of innocence regained. The title of one of Lawrence's paintings, "Eve Regaining Paradise," showing "Eve dodging back into Paradise, between Adam and the Angel at the gate, who are having a fight about it," draws to the foreground this aspect of the novel. "Fate" is flouted, an illusion; the Fall is not irredeemable. "Bit by bit" we can "drop the whole industrial life, an' go back"—back from Tevershall and Stacks Gate, the Satanic mills, and back from Wragby, the Heartbreak House of culture, to the garden, and be once again the "old Adam and the old Eve," "the sons of god with the daughters of men." But *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is not an allegory, of course, but a novel, qualified by reality, and meanwhile the Angel proves formidable. Clifford is, to complete the pattern, the Angel of the fallen world, with all its power. He embodies not only personality and ego, but Science (engineering), Art (his own stories, Proust, the ordered emotions of Racine), Goodness ("Suddenly he had become almost wistfully moral, seeing himself the incarnation of good . . ."), Spirituality ("Believe me, whatever God there is is slowly eliminating the guts and alimentary system from the human be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing to evolve a higher, more spiritual being"), Work (" . . . a certain remarkable inhuman force. . . . In business he was quite inhuman"), and Rule ("And what we need to take up now is whips, not swords"). And he has the key to the park gate.

That Clifford is crippled is not really "unfair," in terms of this struggle, but appropriate. And in any case, he triumphs; for his world is *the* world, and "It won't disappear," as Mellors says. "I'd wipe the machines off the face of the earth again, and end the industrial epoch absolutely," Mellors states. "But since I can't, an' nobody can, I'd better hold my peace, an' try an' live my own life . . . ," which is precisely what he does. Now, as a postscript to the political novels, this represents a rather sudden, sad access of realism. But it would be a mistake to assume that this novel is not also, despite everything, militantly Edenic. No breath of compromise stains its radicalism. Either society is redeemable, in other words, subject to total transformation, or a pure negation, from which seekers after life are wise to flee.

The Lawrence of the political novels and of *Apocalypse* is not actually eclipsed in this novel, as sometimes assumed; more than a little weary, he is merely muted and disguised. He manages to sketch in both the activity and the political structure appropriate to paradise. Fourier's utopian dream of *travail attrayant,* pleasurable work, is dreamed again by Lawrence, another thinker in a long tradition which holds out, to the imagination, the image of a uniprincipled world, where pleasure reconciles even life and death. Here play is the prime activity:

> They ought to learn to be naked and handsome, and to sing in a mass and dance the old group dances, and carve the stools they sit on, and embroider their own emblems. . . . They should be alive and frisky, and acknowledge the great god Pan.

And as for the politics of paradise, they are curiously like Clifford's in *appearance,* so that often when Clifford speaks, one has the illusion that he is echoing earlier Lawrencian political heroes, as when he says, ". . . today education is one of the bad substitutes for a circus. What is wrong today is that we've made a profound hash of the circuses part of the program, and poisoned our masses with a little education." To Lawrence's mind, Clifford is right to suppose that Aristocracy is "a part of fate," wrong to think it "a function," and not what it really is, namely a vocation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the blood. Mellors, of course, is the true aristocrat in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—and that reference to the masses and their great god Pan illustrates his consciousness of his superiority. ("The few can go in for higher cults if they like," he adds. "But let the mass be forever pagan.") In the army, he had himself felt a blood-subjection, in the Lawrencian manner, to a natural aristocrat, the Colonel, who was "a very intelligent man: . . . a passionate man in his way." "I lived under his spell while I was with him," Mellors says. "I sort of let him run my life. And I never regret it." And now he easily sounds masterful, even proprietary, in planning his utopia, as when he says, "An' I'd get my men to wear different clothes."

In this book Lawrence hopes against despair. If only the "higher mystery" and those called to serve it could ask for less than everything; but no, there must be new men and women, in a universe "entirely new" every dawn, lost in "the wonder of life, and of being," or no human beings at all:

> To contemplate the extermination of the human species . . . calms you more than anything else. And if we go on in that way, with everybody, intellectuals, artists, government, industrialists and workers all frantically killing off the last human feeling . . . then ta-tah! to the human species.

Mellors does not stop this destruction because, he says, "I couldn't if I would." But the final note, like John Thomas, is hopeful at heart: there is still the crocus, which comes up despite everything. So long as a "power" stands beyond human beings, can humanity really be beyond redemption? One must go on making demands—radical, relentless, courageous demands.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN HOLLOWAY

Rain-Giants

Five days of rain along this little valley
Have muffled it in miles of hedge-high cloud to market.
A jungle of fragrances webbing at the wet house,
And the garden branded into green that hurts the eye.
The children have given names to the biggest trees:
Dark Arthur the yew, William the beech,
Dead Peter the pine . . . they pine and sigh
All night in the drift of the wind, branch their streaming
Arms as if to touch and graze at the gables.

The sheeted people turn as they sink in sleep
As quiet as ghosts . . . and then . . . sometimes, I know,
From over the skyline beyond the ruined mill
And the flares of the distant runway, and the bare down,
Far bigger creatures come more quietly still
In the empty hours. Ponderous with the past,
Deeper shades in the trees, they loiter inviting
And receding at the grey pane. Come, they say,
The way back is the way down. Come,
Through the un-mapped forest's un-taken branchways
Where the witches sing in the trees . . . They paw at the walls
Hill-high in the hills of rain, soft as clouds.

Their prints like flower-beds darkened across the grass
Are quite gone by the morning . . . I do not know
Where the rain-giants hide by day, but I know the way
Down is the way back: perhaps they lie
In the marrow of the bone until the next night.
. . . But you (at the wheel of my thought) you cannot surmise,
You of all people, what spell like a drench of gold
Sunning those giants, can float them off up the hill
Sighing like the wind?—William, Peter, Arthur
Left woodenly, airily alone?—I am filled with surprise.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Flagstones

'Hooray and up she . . . !'
'Just as the sun was rising . . .'
—A gaiety breaks through the house, over
The broad of the flagstones—humped
With time and the footstep; now
They are grey . . .
the brush to them!
Soap, the brimming bucket. The elbow
Burns, and the dirt
Swishes in a suddy tide the sunshine breaks on
So that light floats up from the floor; an
Emergence of rose
And of gold, fruit-hues, warmth from the cold
Stone, from the daily grey . . .
as the dew warms,
The earth rubs the sun with its mountains;
A glimmer from the hillside orchard
Brushes at the mist . . .
morning tinges; the ghost-like
Lovers, their blood mounts at
Return of the prodigal light; flush, blush and
Resume their giving and—
'Blow away the morning dew . . .'
Bannered and felicitous, labour
Unlabored, a gift a
Habit of humans or the ground, light as
In the flower unbreaking: so
With the arm, let it
Clean or be making as lightly as sun-up
Or the song of a man
Who sings as he scrubs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

D. J. ENRIGHT

Writing Poetry in a Hotel Room

Is it to tame the place perhaps
    —though heaven knows it's hardly
wild? To beautify the spot
    —it's not exactly ugly?

To clear a space where one can walk
    on homely naked feet?
Or make room in the room
    for possibilities of sleep?

Not home (the waiting word) since
    home is where you left it.
Why organize one here, and
    waste the airline ticket?

Away's away. It's simply, if
    the bedside rug is grubby,
kick it underneath the bed.
    Compound with that nude lady

who bears a faded lampshade
    on her brassy head. Learn
the quiddities of cupboards,
    where curtains draw the line.

Till the paperbasket's wastes
    and harvest the *belle vue*.
To open neutral ground
    is one thing poetry can do—

and grow on it: as one might
    even say, a sort of culture. All
the laws of science couldn't white-
    wash that nude lady of the deadly shade;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nor measurement of stress and strain
lay me soundly down to sleep
in this typhonic wind and rain.
I'll rather write of sampans

overturning. No, there's no need to—
I've formed relations with this room,
cool but adequate. I don't mean
to marry it, and take it home.

Watcher in the Sky

They dart or lurch, collide or embrace
(Beaks long, for what? Eyes red, with what?)
They chirp, they screech, they whistle.

Whether the starlings are
Making love or making war
—That I cannot tell.

They meet or they part,
They give or they take,
They jostle or they nestle.

I cannot be sure
—So many of them, so many!—
I know what I like to think.

They are full of life
(One's eyes blur with grateful water)
They are living, lively, full of life.

Off duty too,
Ten twilight minutes for indulgence,
Hand cupped beneath the chin,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Some grander watcher,
Watching us (with maybe grateful, maybe blurring
eyes),
Will he know what he likes to think?

They are full of life
—So many of them, so many!—
They are lively, living, full of life.

LANE DUNLOP

The Snow of Lebanon

GENESIS

In the beginning was the sea, laboring
Like bread with the leaven of the Word,

And then the sky, cloudless and starless
Where the sea, already fallen, left off

Against the dark breakwater of the air.
Oh heavenly breakwater! And God moved

Upon the face of the waters, and said
Let there be light, and there was light:

The sea yearning in desire to the moon
Gave way to the red sabbath of the sun,

The sun breaking its first bread of fire
Climbed the blue sky to a cross of noon;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He made the stars also, and then man
Of the sea's mercy; imagine the scene

If you can, on the fifth and last day
When only God saw that it was good

And the earth shined with his glory
Interior as a blind man's dream of light.

GENESIS (II)

Began on the evening of the first day
Word to bring forth, its seed in itself.

Heaven and earth were said and done
As the sea gave way, and waves knelt

To the stretched out arm of the land
And the sky's endlessly withdrawn smile.

Began on the evening of the third day
Earth to bear fruit, taking root downward,

And the unfallen generation of the dew.
And the sun flowered, and the sea flowed

Under the moon; like an afterthought
The stars came into the sky's mind.

Began on the evening of the fifth day
The sea to give birth, the air to birds:

A vast and sentinel silence listens until
Animal dawn; and man became a living soul.

The sky sealed its lip and upward abyss.
The world was a word old. And time began.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE FALL

God planted a garden eastward in Eden;
There he put the man whom he had formed.

Satan climbed the ladder of paradise,
Tree of desire, whose leaves were loves.

Eve stood at gaze at his limbless guise
In August that seemed to have no end,

Familiar as a room: the sky's blue roof
Cloud-raffered, was a sufficient ceiling.

Only the sea was alien, being unknown,
And sin, waiting to come into its own—

The flood-bringing apple's aftertaste
Of ashes. Faith began with Cherubim

And the sound of a going in the trees'
Green applause; locust's cry of famine,

A flaming sword which turned every way
To keep the way of the tree of life.

The sea, endlessly rehearsing the end
Of all flesh, was yet to be heard from.

THE FLOOD

Noah, searching its fathomed theme
For his dove's answering cry, heard

Only the night wind's promise, and
The promiscuous music of the sea,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The girls of the dark, lisping chaos,
Born of the water's bitter soul.

Dawn spread red on world's thin lip.
No sign in those griefswept skies, and

Only his faith held the day together:
Noon's zero was the eye of the Lord.

A windfall sun charred the orchard sky,
The dove came to him in the evening.

Tough, withered with the sea's touch,
Life came alive with an olive leaf,

Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
Summer and winter, day and night. . .

Saw all peace in the heaven's arch
Past search yet evident as water.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CYNTHIA OZICK

The Pagan Rabbi

> Rabbi Jacob said: "He who is walking along and studying, but then breaks off to remark, 'How lovely is that tree!' or 'How beautiful is that fallow field!'—Scripture regards such a one as having hurt his own being."
>
> —from *The Ethics of the Fathers*

WHEN I HEARD THAT ISAAC KORNFELD, a man of piety and brains, had hanged himself in the public park, I put a token in the subway stile and journeyed out to see the tree.

We had been classmates in the rabbinical seminary. Our fathers were both rabbis. They were also friends, but only in a loose way of speaking: in actuality our fathers were enemies. They vied with one another in demonstrations of charitableness, in the captious glitter of their scholiae, in the number of their adherents. Of the two, Isaac's father was the milder. I was afraid of my father; he had a certain disease of the larynx, and if he even uttered something so trivial as "Bring the tea" to my mother, it came out splintered, clamorous, and vindictive.

Neither man was philosophical in the slightest. It was the one thing they agreed on. "Philosophy is an abomination," Isaac's father used to say. "The Greeks were philosophers, but they remained children playing with their dolls. Even Socrates, a monotheist, nevertheless sent money down to the temple to pay for incense to their doll."

"Idolatry is the abomination," Isaac argued, "not philosophy."

"The latter is the corridor to the former," his father said.

My own father claimed that if not for philosophy I would never have been brought to the atheism which finally led me to withdraw, in my second year, from the seminary. The trouble was not philosophy—I had none of Isaac's talent: his teachers later said of him that his imagination was so remarkable he could concoct holiness out of the fine line of a serif. On the day of his funeral the president of his college was criticized for having commented that although a suicide could not be buried in consecrated earth, whatever earth enclosed Isaac Kornfeld was ipso facto consecrated. It should be noted that Isaac hanged

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

himself several weeks short of his thirty-sixth birthday; he was then at the peak of his renown; and the president, of course, did not know the whole story. He judged by Isaac's reputation, which was at no time more impressive than just before his death.

I judged by the same, and marveled that all that holy genius and intellectual surprise should in the end be raised no higher than the next-to-lowest limb of a delicate young oak, with burly roots like the toes of a gryphon exposed in the wet ground.

The tree was almost alone in a long rough meadow, which sloped down to a bay filled with sickly clams and a bad smell. The place was called Trilham's Inlet, and I knew what the smell meant: that cold brown water covered half the city's turds.

On the day I came to see the tree the air was bleary with fog. The weather was well into autumn and, though it was Sunday, the walks were empty. There was something historical about the park just then, with its rusting grasses and deserted monuments. In front of a soldiers' cenotaph a plastic wreath left behind months before by some civic parade stood propped against a stone frieze of identical marchers in the costume of an old war. A banner across the wreath's belly explained that the purpose of war is peace. At the margins of the park they were building a gigantic highway. I felt I was making my way across a battlefield silenced by the victory of the peace machines. The bulldozers had bitten far into the park, and the rolled carcasses of the sacrificed trees were already cut up into logs. There were dozens of felled maples, elms, and oaks. Their moist inner wheels breathed out a fragrance of barns, countryside, decay.

In the bottommost meadow fringing the water I recognized the tree which had caused Isaac to sin against his own life. It looked curiously like a photograph—not only like that newspaper photograph I carried warmly in my pocket, which showed the field and its markers—the drinking-fountain a few yards off, the ruined brick wall of an old estate behind. The caption-writer had particularly remarked on the "rope." But the rope was no longer there; the widow had claimed it. It was his own prayer-shawl that Isaac, a short man, had thrown over the comely neck of the next-to-lowest limb. A Jew is buried in his prayer-shawl; the police had handed it over to Sheindel. I observed that the bark was rubbed at that spot. The tree lay back against the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sky like a licked postage-stamp. Rain began to beat it flatter yet. A stench of sewage came up like a veil in the nostril. It seemed to me I was a man in a photograph standing next to a grey blur of tree. I would stand through eternity beside Isaac's guilt if I did not run, so I ran that night to Sheindel herself.

I loved her at once. I am speaking now of the first time I saw her, though I don't exclude the last. The last—the last together with Isaac—was soon after my divorce; at one stroke I left my wife and my cousin's fur business to the small upstate city in which both had repined. Suddenly Isaac and Sheindel and two babies appeared in the lobby of my hotel—they were passing through: Isaac had a lecture engagement in Canada. We sat under scarlet neon and Isaac told how my father could now not speak at all.

"He keeps his vow," I said.

"No, no, he's a sick man," Isaac said. "An obstruction in the throat."

"I'm the obstruction. You know what he said when I left the seminary. He meant it, never mind how many years it is. He's never addressed a word to me since."

"We were reading together. He blamed the reading, who can blame *him*? Fathers like ours don't know how to love. They live too much indoors."

It was an odd remark, though I was too much preoccupied with my own resentments to notice. "It wasn't what we read," I objected. "Torah tells that an illustrious man doesn't have an illustrious son. Otherwise he wouldn't be humble like other people. This much scholarly stuffing I retain. Well, so my father always believed he was more illustrious than anybody, especially more than your father. *There*fore," I delivered in Talmudic cadence, "what chance did I have? A nincompoop and no *sitzfleish*. Now you, you could answer questions that weren't even invented yet. Then you invented them."

"Torah isn't a spade," Isaac said. "A man should have a livelihood. You had yours."

"The pelt of a dead animal isn't a living either, it's an indecency."

All the while Sheindel was sitting perfectly still; the babies, female infants in long stockings, were asleep in her arms. She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wore a dark thick woolen hat—it was July—that covered every part of her hair. But I had once seen it in all its streaming black shine.

"And Jane?" Isaac asked finally.

"Speaking of dead animals. Tell my father—he won't answer a letter, he won't come to the telephone—that in the matter of the marriage he was right, but for the wrong reason. If you share a bed with a Puritan you'll come into it cold and you'll go out of it cold. Listen, Isaac, my father calls me an atheist, but between the conjugal sheets every Jew is a believer in miracles, even the lapsed."

He said nothing then. He knew I envied him his Sheindel and his luck. Unlike our fathers, Isaac had never condemned me for my marriage, which his father regarded as his private triumph over my father, and which my father, in his public defeat, took as an occasion for declaring me as one dead. He rent his clothing and sat on a stool for eight days, while Isaac's father came to watch him mourn, secretly satisfied, though aloud he grieved for all apostates. Isaac did not like my wife. He called her a tall yellow straw. After we were married he never said a word against her, but he kept away.

I went with my wife to his wedding. We took the early train down especially, but when we arrived the feast was well under way, and the guests far into the dancing.

"Look, look, they don't dance together," Jane said.

"Who?"

"The men and the women. The bride and the groom."

"Count the babies," I advised. "The Jews are also Puritans, but only in public."

The bride was enclosed all by herself on a straight chair in the center of a spinning ring of young men. The floor heaved under their whirl. They stamped, the chandeliers shuddered, the guests cried out, the young men with linked arms spiraled and their skullcaps came flying off like centrifugal balloons. Isaac, a mist of black suit, a stamping foot, was lost in the planet's wake of black suits and emphatic feet. The dancing young men shouted bridal songs, the floor leaned like a plate, the whole room teetered.

Isaac had told me something of Sheindel. Before now I had never seen her. Her birth was in a concentration camp, and they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were about to throw her against the electrified fence when an army mobbed the gate; the current vanished from the terrible wires, and she had nothing to show for it afterward but a mark on her cheek like an asterisk, cut by a barb. The asterisk pointed to certain dry footnotes: she had no mother to show, she had no father to show, but she had, extraordinarily, God to show—she was known to be, for her age and sex, astonishingly learned. She was only seventeen.

"What pretty hair she has," Jane said.

Now Sheindel was dancing with Isaac's mother. All the ladies made a fence, and the bride, twirling with her mother-in-law, lost a shoe and fell against the long laughing row. The ladies lifted their glistering breasts in their lacy dresses and laughed; the young men, stamping two by two, went on shouting their wedding songs. Sheindel danced without her shoe, and the black river of her hair followed her.

"After today she'll have to hide it all," I explained.

Jane asked why.

"So as not to be a temptation to men," I told her, and covertly looked for my father. There he was, in a shadow, apart. My eyes discovered his eyes. He turned his back and gripped his throat.

"It's a very anthropological experience," Jane said.

"A wedding is a wedding," I answered her, "among us even more so."

"Is that your father over there, that little scowly man?"

To Jane all Jews were little. "My father the man of the cloth. Yes."

"A wedding is not a wedding," said Jane: we had had only a license and a judge with bad breath.

"Everybody marries for the same reason."

"No," said my wife. "Some for love and some for spite.'

"And everybody for bed."

"Some for spite," she insisted.

"I was never cut out for a man of the cloth," I said. "My poor father doesn't see that."

"He doesn't speak to you."

"A technicality. He's losing his voice."

"Well, he's not like you. He doesn't do it for spite," Jane said.

"You don't know him," I said.

He lost it altogether the very week Isaac published his first re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

markable collection of responsa. Isaac's father crowed like a passionate rooster, and packed his wife and himself off to the Holy Land to boast on the holy soil. Isaac was a little relieved; he had just been made Professor of Mishnaic History, and his father's whims and pretenses and foolish rivalries were an embarrassment. It is easy to honor a father from afar, but bitter to honor one who is dead. A surgeon cut out my father's voice, and he died without a word.

Isaac and I no longer met. Our ways were too disparate. Isaac was famous, if not in the world, certainly in the kingdom of jurists and scholars. By this time I had acquired a partnership in a small book store in a basement. My partner sold me his share, and I put up a new sign: "The Book Cellar"; for reasons more obscure than filial (all the same I wished my father could have seen it) I established a department devoted especially to not-quite-rare theological works, chiefly in Hebrew and Aramaic, though I carried some Latin and Greek. When Isaac's second volume reached my shelves (I had now expanded to street level), I wrote him to congratulate him, and after that we corresponded, not with any regularity. He took to ordering all his books from me, and we exchanged awkward little jokes. "I'm still in the jacket business," I told him, "but now I feel I'm where I belong. Last time I went too fur." "Sheindel is well, and Naomi and Esther have a sister," he wrote. And later: "Naomi, Esther, and Miriam have a sister." And still later: "Naomi, Esther, Miriam, and Ophra have a sister." It went on until there were seven girls. "There's nothing in Torah that prevents an illustrious man from having illustrious daughters," I wrote him when he said he had given up hope of another rabbi in the family. "But where do you find seven illustrious husbands?" he asked. Every order brought another quip, and we bantered back and forth in this way for some years.

I noticed that he read everything. Long ago he had inflamed my taste, but I could never keep up. No sooner did I catch his joy in Saadia Gaon, than he had already sprung ahead to Yehudah Halevi. One day he was weeping with Dostoyevski and the next leaping in the air over Thomas Mann. He introduced me to Hegel and Nietzsche while our fathers wailed. His mature reading was no more peaceable than those frenzies of his youth, when I would come upon him in an abandoned classroom at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dusk, his stocking feet on the windowsill, the light already washed from the lowest city clouds, wearing the look of a man half-sotted with print.

But when the widow asked me—covering a certain excess of alertness or irritation—whether to my knowledge Isaac had lately been ordering any books on horticulture, I was astonished.

"He bought so much," I demurred.

"Yes, yes, yes," she said. "How could you remember?"

She poured the tea and then, with a discreetness of gesture, lifted my dripping raincoat from the chair where I had thrown it and took it out of the room. It was a crowded apartment, not very neat, far from slovenly, cluttered with dolls and tiny dishes and an array of tricycles. The dining table was as large as a desert. An old-fashioned crocheted lace runner divided it into two nations, and on the end of this, in the neutral zone, so to speak, Sheindel had placed my cup. There was no physical relic of Isaac: not even a book.

She returned. "My girls are all asleep, we can talk. What an ordeal for you, weather like this and going out so far to that place."

It was impossible to tell whether she was angry or not. I had rushed in on her like the rainfall itself, scattering drops, my shoes stuck all over with leaves.

"I comprehend exactly why you went out there. The impulse of a detective," she said. Her voice contained an irony that surprised me. It was brilliantly and unmistakably accented, and because of this jaggedly precise. It was as if every word emitted a quick white thread of great purity, like hard silk, which she was then obliged to bite cleanly off. "You went to find something? An atmosphere? The sadness itself?"

"There was nothing to see," I said, and thought I was lunatic to have put myself in her way.

"Did you dig in the ground? He might have buried a note for goodbye."

"Was there a note?" I asked, startled.

"He left nothing behind for ordinary humanity like yourself."

I saw she was playing with me. "Rebbetzin Kornfeld," I said, standing up, "forgive me. My coat, please, and I'll go."

"Sit," she commanded. "Isaac read less lately, did you notice that?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I gave her a civil smile. "All the same he was buying more and more."

"Think," she said. "I depend on you. You're just the one who might know. I had forgotten this. God sent you perhaps."

"Rebbetzin Kornfeld, I'm only a bookseller."

"God in his judgment sent me a bookseller. For such a long time Isaac never read at home. Think! Agronomy?"

"I don't remember anything like that. What would a Professor of Mishnaic History want with agronomy?"

"If he had a new book under his arm he would take it straight to the seminary and hide it in his office."

"I mailed to his office. If you like I can look up some of the titles—"

"You were in the park and you saw nothing?"

"Nothing." Then I was ashamed. "I saw the tree."

"And what is that? A tree is nothing."

"Rebbetzin Kornfeld," I pleaded, "it's a stupidity that I came here. I don't know myself why I came, I beg your pardon, I had no idea—"

"You came to learn why Isaac took his life. Botany? Or even, please listen, even mycology? He never asked you to send something on mushrooms? Or having to do with herbs? Manure? Flowers? A certain kind of agricultural poetry? A book about gardening? Forestry? Vegetables? Cereal growing?"

"Nothing, nothing like that," I said excitedly. "Rebbetzin Kornfeld, your husband was a rabbi!"

"I know what my husband was. Something to do with vines? Arbors? Rice? Think, think, think! Anything to do with land—meadows—goats—a farm, hay—anything at all, anything rustic or lunar—"

"Lunar! My God! Was he a teacher or a nurseryman? Goats! Was he a furrier? Sheindel, are you crazy? *I* was the furrier! What do you want from the dead?"

Without a word she replenished my cup, though it was more than half full, and sat down opposite me, on the other side of the lace boundary-line. She leaned her face into her palms, but I saw her eyes. She kept them wide.

"Rebbetzin Kornfeld," I said, collecting myself, "with a tragedy like this—"

"You imagine I blame the books. I don't blame the books,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whatever they were. If he had been faithful to his books he would have lived."

"He lived," I cried, "in books, what else?"

"No," said the widow.

"A scholar. A rabbi. A remarkable Jew!"

At this she spilled a furious laugh. "Tell me, I have always been very interested and shy to inquire. Tell me about your wife."

I intervened: "I haven't had a wife in years."

"What are they like, those people?"

"They're exactly like us, if you can think what we would be if we were like them."

"We are not like them. Their bodies are more to them than ours are to us. Our books are holy, to them their bodies are holy."

"Jane's was so holy she hardly ever let me get near it," I muttered to myself.

"Isaac used to run in the park, but he lost his breath too quickly. Instead he read in a book about runners with hats made of leaves."

"Sheindel, Sheindel, what did you expect of him? He was a student, he sat and he thought, he was a Jew."

She thrust her hands flat. "He was not."

I could not reply. I looked at her merely. She was thinner now than in her early young-womanhood, and her face had an in-between cast, poignant still at the mouth and jaw, beginning to grow coarse on either side of the nose.

"I think he was never a Jew," she said.

I wondered whether Isaac's suicide had unbalanced her.

"I'll tell you a story," she resumed. "A story about stories. These were the bedtime stories Isaac told Naomi and Esther: about mice that danced and children who laughed. When Miriam came he invented a speaking cloud. With Ophra it was a turtle that married a blade of withered grass. By Leah's time the stones had tears for their leglessness. Rebecca cried because of a tree that turned into a girl and could never grow colors again in the autumn. Shiphrah, the littlest, believes that a pig has a soul."

"My own father used to drill me every night in sacred recitation. It was a terrible childhood."

"He insisted on picnics. Each time we went farther and far-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ther into the country. It was a madness. Isaac never troubled to learn to drive a car, and there was always a clumsiness of baskets to carry and a clutter of buses and trains and seven exhausted wild girls. And he would look for special places—we couldn't settle just here or there, there had to be a brook or such-and-such a slope or else a little grove. And then, though he said it was all for the children's pleasure, he would leave them and go off alone and never come back until sunset, when everything was spilled and the air freezing and the babies crying."

"I was a grown man before I had the chance to go on a picnic," I admitted.

"I'm speaking of the beginning," said the widow. "Like you, wasn't I fooled? I was fooled, I was charmed. Going home with our baskets of berries and flowers we were a romantic huddle. Isaac's stories on those nights were full of dark invention. May God preserve me, I even begged him to write them down. Then suddenly he joined a club, and Sunday mornings he was up and away before dawn."

"A club? So early? What library opens at that hour?" I said, stunned that a man like Isaac should ally himself with anything so doubtful.

"Ah, you don't follow, you don't follow. It was a hiking club, they met under the moon. I thought it was a pity, the whole week Isaac was so inward, he needed air for the mind. He used to come home too fatigued to stand. He said he went for the landscape. I was like you, I took what I heard, I heard it all and never followed. He resigned from the hikers finally, and I believed all that strangeness was finished. He told me it was absurd to walk at such a pace, he was a teacher and not an athlete. Then he began to write."

"But he always wrote," I objected.

"Not this way. What he wrote was only fairy tales. He kept at it and for a while he neglected everything else. It was the strangeness in another form. The stories surprised me, they were so poor and dull. They were a little like the ideas he used to scare the girls with, but choked all over with notes, appendices, prefaces. It struck me then he didn't seem to understand he was only doing fairy tales. Yet they were really very ordinary—full of sprites, nymphs, gods, everything ordinary and old."

"Will you let me see them?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Burned, all burned."

"Isaac burned them?"

"You don't think I did! I see what you think."

It was true that I was marveling at her hatred. I supposed she was one of those born to dread imagination. I was overtaken by a coldness for her, though the sight of her small hands with their tremulous staves of fingers turning and turning in front of her face like a gate on a hinge reminded me of where she was born and who she was. She was an orphan and had been saved by magic and had a terror of it. The coldness fled. "Why should you be bothered by little stories?" I inquired. "It wasn't the stories that killed him."

"No, no, not the stories," she said. "Stupid corrupt things. I was glad when he gave them up. He piled them in the bathtub and lit them with a match. Then he put a notebook in his coat pocket and said he would walk in the park. Week after week he tried all the parks in the city. I didn't dream what he could be after. One day he took the subway and rode to the end of the line, and this was the right park at last. He went every day after class. An hour going, an hour back. Two, three in the morning he came home. 'Is it exercise?' I said. I thought he might be running again. He used to shiver with the chill of night and the dew. 'No, I sit quite still,' he said. 'Is it more stories you do out there?' 'No, I only jot down what I think.' 'A man should meditate in his own house, not by night near bad water,' I said. Six, seven in the morning he came home. I asked him if he meant to find his grave in that place."

She broke off with a cough, half artifice and half resignation, so loud that it made her crane toward the bedrooms to see if she had awakened a child. "I don't sleep any more," she told me. "Look around you. Look, look everywhere, look on the windowsills. Do you see any plants, any common houseplants? I went down one evening and gave them to the garbage collector. I couldn't sleep in the same space with plants. They are like little trees. Am I deranged? Take Isaac's notebook and bring it back when you can."

I obeyed. In my own room, a sparse place, with no ornaments but a few pretty stalks in pots, I did not delay and seized the notebook. It was a tiny affair, three inches by five, with ruled pages

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that opened on a coiled wire. I read searchingly, hoping for something not easily evident. Sheindel by her melancholy innuendo had made me believe that in these few sheets Isaac had revealed the reason for his suicide. But it was all a disappointment. There was not a word of any importance. After a while I concluded that, whatever her motives, Sheindel was playing with me again. She meant to punish me for asking the unaskable. My inquisitiveness offended her; she had given me Isaac's notebook not to enlighten but to rebuke. The handwriting was recognizable yet oddly formed, shaky and even senile, like that of a man outdoors and deskless who scribbles in his palm or on his lifted knee or leaning on a bit of bark; and there was no doubt that the wrinkled leaves, with their ragged corners, had been in and out of someone's pocket. So I did not mistrust Sheindel's mad anecdote; this much was true: a park, Isaac, a notebook, all at once, but signifying no more than that a professor with a literary turn of mind had gone for a walk. There was even a green stain straight across one of the quotations, as if the pad had slipped grassward and been trod on.

I have forgotten to mention that the notebook, though scantily filled, was in three languages. The Greek I could not read at all, but it had the shape of verse. The Hebrew was simply a miscellany, drawn mostly from Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Among these I found the following extracts, transcribed not quite verbatim:

> Ye shall utterly destroy all the places of the gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree.
>
> And the soul that turneth after familiar spirits to go a-whoring after them, I will cut him off from among his people.

These, of course, were ordinary unadorned notes, such as any classroom lecturer might commonly make to remind himself of the text, with a phrase cut out here and there for the sake of speeding his hand. Or I thought it possible that Isaac might at that time have been preparing a paper on the Talmudic commentaries for these passages. Whatever the case, the remaining quotations, chiefly from English poetry, interested me only slightly more. They were the elegiac favorites of a closeted Romantic. I was repelled by Isaac's Nature: it wore a capital letter,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and smelled like my own Book Cellar. It was plain to me that he had lately grown painfully academic: he could not see a weed's tassel without finding a classical reference for it. He had put down a snatch of Byron, a smudge of Keats (like his Scriptural copyings, these too were quick and fragmented), a pair of truncated lines from Tennyson, and this unmarked and clumsy quatrain:

> And yet all is not taken. Still one Dryad
> Flits through the wood, one Oread skims the hill;
> White in the whispering stream still gleams a Naiad;
> The beauty of the earth is haunted still.

All of this was so cloying and mooning and ridiculous, and so pedantic besides, that I felt ashamed for him. And yet there was almost nothing else, nothing to redeem him and nothing personal, only a sentence or two in his rigid self-controlled scholar's style, not unlike the starched little jokes of our correspondence. "I am writing at dusk sitting on a stone in Trilham's Inlet Park, within sight of Trilham's Inlet, a bay to the north of the city, and within two yards of a slender tree, *Quercus velutina,* the age of which, should one desire to measure it, can be ascertained by (God forbid) cutting the bole and counting the rings. The man writing is thirty-five years old and aging too rapidly, which may be ascertained by counting the rings under his poor myopic eyes." Below this, deliberate and readily more legible than the rest, appeared three curious words:

Great Pan lives.

That was all. In a day or so I returned the notebook to Sheindel. I told myself that she had seven orphans to worry over, and repressed my anger at having been cheated.

She was waiting for me. "I am so sorry, there was a letter in the notebook, it had fallen out. I found it on the carpet after you left."

"Thank you, no," I said. "I've read enough out of Isaac's pockets."

"Then why did you come to see me to begin with?"

"I came," I said, "just to see you."

"You came for Isaac." But she was more mocking than dis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

traught. "I gave you everything you needed to see what happened and still you don't follow. Here." She held out a large law-sized paper. "Read the letter."

"I've read his notebook. If everything I need to fathom Isaac is in the notebook I don't need the letter."

"It's a letter he wrote to explain himself," she persisted.

"You told me Isaac left you no notes."

"It was not written to me."

I sat down on one of the dining room chairs and Sheindel put the page before me on the table. It lay face up on the lace divider. I did not look at it.

"It's a love letter," Sheindel whispered. "When they cut him down they found the notebook in one pocket and the letter in the other."

I did not know what to say.

"The police gave me everything," Sheindel said. "Everything to keep."

"A love letter?" I repeated.

"That is what such letters are commonly called."

"And the police—they gave it to you, and that was the first you realized what"—I floundered after the inconceivable—"what could be occupying him?"

"What could be occupying him," she mimicked. "Yes. Not until they took the letter and the notebook out of his pocket."

"My God. His habit of life, his mind . . . I can't imagine it. You never guessed?"

"No."

"These trips to the park—"

"He had become aberrant in many ways. I have described them to you."

"But the park! Going off like that, alone—you didn't think he might be meeting a woman?"

"It was not a woman."

Disgust like a powder clotted my nose. "Sheindel, you're crazy."

"I'm crazy, is that it? Read his confession! Read it! How long can I be the only one to know this thing? Do you want my brain to melt? Be my confidant," she entreated so unexpectedly that I held my breath.

"You've said nothing to anyone?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Would they have recited such eulogies if I had? Read the letter!"

"I have no interest in the abnormal," I said coldly

She raised her eyes and watched me for the smallest space. Without any change in the posture of her suppliant head her laughter began; I have never since heard sounds like those—almost mouselike in density for fear of waking her sleeping daughters, but so rational in intent that it was like listening to astonished sanity rendered into a cackling fugue. She kept it up for a minute and then calmed herself. "Please sit where you are. Please pay attention. I will read the letter to you myself."

She plucked the page from the table with an orderly gesture. I saw that this letter had been scrupulously prepared; it was closely written. Her tone was cleansed by scorn.

" 'My ancestors were led out of Egypt by the hand of God,' " she read.

"Is this how a love letter starts out?"

She moved on resolutely. " 'We were guilty of so-called abominations well-described elsewhere. Other peoples have been nourished on their mythologies. For aeons we have been weaned from all traces of the same.' "

I felt myself becoming impatient. The fact was I had returned with a single idea: I meant to marry Isaac's widow when enough time had passed to make it seemly. It was my intention to court her with great subtlety at first, so that I would not appear to be presuming on her sorrow. But she was possessed. "Sheindel, why do you want to inflict this treatise on me? Give it to the seminary, contribute it to a symposium of professors."

"I would sooner die."

At this I began to attend in earnest.

" 'I will leave aside the wholly plausible position of so-called animism within the concept of the One God. I will omit a historical illumination of its continuous but covert expression even within the Fence of the Law. Creature, I leave these aside—' "

"What?" I yelped.

" 'Creature,' " she repeated, spreading her nostrils. " 'What is human history? What is our philosophy? What is our religion? None of these teaches us poor human ones that we are alone in the universe, and even without them we would know that we are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not. At a very young age I understood that a foolish man would not believe in a fish had he not had one enter his experience. Innumerable forms exist and have come to our eyes, and to the still deeper eye of the lens of our instruments; from this minute perception of what already is, it is easy to conclude that further forms are possible, that all forms are probable. God created the world not for Himself alone, or I would not now possess this consciousness with which I am enabled to address thee, Loveliness.' "

"Thee," I echoed, and swallowed a sad bewilderment.

"You must let me go on," Sheindel said, and grimly went on. " 'It is false history, false philosophy, and false religion which declare to us human ones that we live among Things. The arts of physics and chemistry begin to teach us differently, but their way of compassion is new, and finds few to carry fidelity to its logical and beautiful end. The molecules dance inside all forms, and within the molecules dance the atoms, and within the atoms dance still profounder sources of divine vitality. There is nothing that is Dead. There is no Non-life. Holy life subsists even in the stone, even in the bones of dead dogs and dead men. Hence in God's fecundating Creation there is no possibility of Idolatry, and therefore no possibility of committing this so-called abomination.' "

"My God, my God," I wailed. "Enough, Sheindel, it's more than enough, no more—"

"There is more," she said.

"I don't want to hear it."

"He stains his character for you? A spot, do you think? You will hear." She took up in a voice which all at once reminded me of my father's: it was unforgiving. " 'Creature, I rehearse these matters though all our language is as breath to thee; as baubles for the juggler. Where we struggle to understand from day to day, and contemplate the grave for its riddle, the other breeds are born fulfilled in wisdom. Animal races conduct themselves without self-investigations; instinct is a higher and not a lower thing. Alas, that we human ones—but for certain pitifully primitive approximations in those few reflexes and involuntary actions left to our bodies—are born bare of instinct! All that we unfortunates must resort to through science, art, philosophy, re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ligion, all our imaginings and tormented strivings, all our meditations and vain questionings, all!—are expressed naturally and rightly in the beasts, the plants, the rivers, the stones. The reason is simple, it is our tragedy: our soul is included in us, it inhabits us, we contain it, when we seek our soul we must seek in ourselves. To *see* the soul, to confront it—that is divine wisdom. Yet how can we see into our dark selves? With the other races of being it is differently ordered. The soul of the plant does not reside in the chlorophyll, it may roam if it wishes, it may choose whatever form or shape it pleases. Hence the other breeds, being largely free of their soul and able to witness it, can live in peace. To see one's soul is to know all, to know all is to own the peace our philosophies futilely envisage. Earth displays two categories of soul: the free and the indwelling. We human ones are cursed with the indwelling—' "

"Stop!" I cried.

"I will not," said the widow.

"Please, you told me he burned his fairy tales."

"Did I lie to you? Will you say I lied?"

"Then for Isaac's sake why didn't you? If this isn't a fairy tale what do you want me to think it could be?"

"Think what you like."

"Sheindel," I said, "I beg you, don't destroy a dead man's honor. Don't look at this thing again, tear it to pieces, don't continue with it."

"I don't destroy his honor. He had none."

"Please! Listen to yourself! My God, who was the man? Rabbi Isaac Kornfeld! Talk of honor! Wasn't he a teacher? Wasn't he a scholar?"

"He was a pagan."

Her eyes returned without hesitation to their task. She commenced: " 'All these truths I learned only gradually, against my will and desire. Our teacher Moses did not speak of them; much may be said under this head. It was not out of ignorance that Moses failed to teach about those souls that are free. If I have learned what Moses knew, is this not because we are both men? He was a man, but God addressed him; it was God's will that our ancestors should no longer be slaves. Yet our ancestors, being stiff-necked, would not have abandoned their slavery in Egypt had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they been taught of the free souls. They would have said: "Let us stay, our bodies will remain enslaved in Egypt, but our souls will wander at their pleasure in Zion. If the cactus-plant stays rooted while its soul roams, why not also a man?" And if Moses had replied that only the world of Nature has the gift of the free soul, while man is chained to his, and that a man, to free his soul, must also free the body that is its vessel, they would have scoffed. "How is it that men, and men alone, are different from the world of Nature? If this is so, then the condition of men is evil and unjust, and if this condition of ours is evil and unjust in general, what does it matter whether we are slaves in Egypt or citizens in Zion?" And they would not have done God's will and abandoned their slavery. Therefore Moses never spoke to them of the free souls, lest the people not do God's will and go out from Egypt' "

In an instant a sensation broke in me—it was entirely obscure, there was nothing I could compare it with, and yet I was certain I recognized it. And then I did. It hurtled me into childhood—it was the crisis of insight one experiences when one has just read out, for the first time, that conglomeration of figurines which makes a word. In that moment I penetrated beyond Isaac's alphabet into his language. I saw that he was on the side of possibility: he was both sane and inspired. His intention was not to accumulate mystery but to dispel it.

"All that part is brilliant," I burst out.

Sheindel meanwhile had gone to the sideboard to take a sip of cold tea that was standing there. "In a minute," she said, and pursued her thirst. "I have heard of drawings surpassing Rembrandt daubed by madmen who when released from the fit couldn't hold the chalk. What follows is beautiful, I warn you."

"The man was a genius."

"Yes."

"Go on," I urged.

She produced for me her clownish jeering smile. She read: " 'Sometimes in the desert journey on the way they would come to a watering-place, and some quick spry boy would happen to glimpse the soul of the spring (which the wild Greeks afterward called naiad), but not knowing of the existence of the free souls he would suppose only that the moon had cast a momentary beam across the water. Loveliness, with the same innocence of accident I discovered thee. Loveliness, Loveliness.' "

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She stopped.

"Is that all?"

"There is more."

"Read it."

"The rest is the love letter."

"Is it hard for you?" But I asked with more eagerness than pity.

"I was that man's wife, he scaled the Fence of the Law. For this God preserved me from the electric fence. Read it for yourself."

Incontinently I snatched the crowded page.

" 'Loveliness, in thee the joy, substantiation, and supernal succor of my theorem. How many hours through how many years I walked over the cilia-forests of our enormous aspirating vegetable-star, this light rootless seed that crawls in its single furrow, this shaggy mazy unimplanted cabbage-head of our earth!—never, all that time, all those days of unfulfillment, a white space like a desert thirst, never, never to grasp. I thought myself abandoned to the intrigue of my folly. At dawn, on a hillock, what seemed the very shape and seizing of the mound's nature—what was it? Only the haze of the sunball growing great through hoarfrost. The oread slipped from me, leaving her illusion; or was never there at all; or was there but for an instant, and ran away. What sly ones the free souls are! They have a comedy we human ones cannot dream: the laughing drunkard feels in himself the shadow of the shadow of the shadow of their wit, and only because he has made himself a vessel, as the two banks and the bed of a rivulet are the naiad's vessel. A naiad I may indeed have viewed whole: all seven of my daughters were once wading in a stream in a compact but beautiful park, of which I had much hope. The youngest being not yet two, and fretful, the older ones were told to keep her always by the hand, but they did not obey. I, having passed some way into the woods behind, all at once heard a scream and noise of splashes, and caught sight of a tiny body flying down into the water. Running back through the trees I could see the others bunched together, afraid, as the baby dived helplessly, all these little girls frozen in a garland—when suddenly one of them (it was too quick a movement for me to recognize which) darted to the struggler, who was now underwater, and pulled her up, and put an arm around her to soothe her. The arm was blue—blue. As blue as a lake. And fiercely, from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my spot on the bank, panting, I began to count the little girls. I counted eight, thought myself not mad but delivered, again counted, counted seven, knew I had counted well before, knew I counted well even now. A blue-armed girl had come to wade among them. Which is to say the shape of a girl. I questioned my daughters: each in her fright believed one of the others had gone to pluck up the tiresome baby. None wore a dress with blue sleeves.' "

"Proofs," said the widow. "Isaac was meticulous, he used to account for all his proofs always."

"How?" My hand in tremor rustled Isaac's letter; the paper bleated as though whipped.

"By eventually finding a principle to cover them," she finished maliciously. "Well, don't rest even for me, you don't oblige me. You have a long story to go, long enough to make a fever."

"Tea," I said hoarsely.

She brought me her own cup from the sideboard, and I believed as I drank that I swallowed some of her mockery and gall.

"Sheindel, for a woman so pious you're a great skeptic." And now the tremor had command of my throat.

"An atheist's statement," she rejoined. "The more piety, the more skepticism. A religious man comprehends this. Superfluity, excess of custom, and superstition would climb like a choking vine on the Fence of the Law if skepticism did not continually hack them away to make freedom for purity."

I then thought her fully worthy of Isaac. Whether I was worthy of her I evaded putting to myself; instead I gargled some tea and returned to the letter.

" 'It pains me to confess,' " I read, " 'how after that I moved from clarity to doubt and back again. I had no trust in my conclusions because all my experiences were evanescent. Everything certain I attributed to some other cause less certain. Every voice out of the moss I blamed on rabbits and squirrels. Every motion among leaves I called a bird, though there positively was no bird. My first sight of the Little People struck me as no more than a shudder of literary delusion, and I determined they could only be an instantaneous crop of mushrooms. But one night, a little after ten o'clock at the crux of summer—the sky still showed strings of light—I was wandering in this place, this place where they will find my corpse—' "

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Not for my sake," said Sheindel when I hesitated.

"It's terrible," I croaked, "terrible."

"Withered like a shell," she said, as though speaking of the cosmos; and I understood from her manner that she had a fanatic's acquaintance with this letter, and knew it nearly by heart. She appeared to be thinking the words faster than I could bring them out, and for some reason I was constrained to hurry the pace of my reading.

" '—where they will find my corpse withered like the shell of an insect,' " I rushed on. " 'The smell of putrefaction lifted clearly from the bay. I began to speculate about my own body after I was dead—whether the soul would be set free immediately after the departure of life; or whether only gradually, as decomposition proceeded and more and more of the indwelling soul was released to freedom. But when I considered how a man's body is no better than a clay pot, a fact which none of our sages has ever contradicted, it seemed to me then that an indwelling soul by its own nature would be obliged to cling to its bit of pottery until the last crumb and grain had vanished into earth. I walked through the ditches of that black meadow grieving and swollen with self-pity. It came to me that while my poor bones went on decaying at their ease, my soul would have to linger inside them, waiting, despairing, longing to join the free ones. I cursed it for its gravity-despoiled, slow, interminably languishing purse of flesh; better to be encased in vapor, in wind, in a hair of a coconut! Who knows how long it takes the body of a man to shrink into gravel, and the gravel into sand, and the sand into vitamin? A hundred years? Two hundred, three hundred? A thousand perhaps! Is it not true that bones nearly intact are constantly being dug up by the paleontologists two million years after burial?'—Sheindel," I interrupted, "this is death, not love. Where's the love letter to be afraid of here? I don't find it."

"Continue," she ordered. And then: "You see I'm not afraid."

"Not of love?"

"No. But you recite much too slowly. Your mouth is shaking. Are you afraid of death?"

I did not reply.

"Continue," she said again. "Go rapidly. The next sentence begins with an extraordinary thought."

" 'An extraordinary thought emerged in me. It was luminous,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

profound, and practical. More than that, it had innumerable precedents; the mythologies had documented it a dozen dozen times over. I recalled all those mortals reputed to have coupled with gods (a collective word, showing much common sense, signifying what our philosophies more abstrusely call Shekhina), and all that poignant miscegenation represented by centaurs, satyrs, mermaids, fauns, and so forth, not to speak of that even more famous mingling in Genesis, whereby the sons of God took the daughters of men for brides, producing giants and possibly also those abortions, leviathan and behemoth, of which we read in Job, along with unicorns and other chimeras and monsters abundant in Scripture, hence far from fanciful. There existed also the example of the succubus Lilith, who was often known to couple in the mediaeval ghetto even with pre-pubescent boys. By all these evidences I was emboldened in my confidence that I was surely not the first man to conceive such a desire in the history of our earth. Creature, the thought that took hold of me was this: if only I could couple with one of the free souls, the strength of the connection would likely wrest my own soul from my body—seize it, as if by a tongs, draw it out, so to say, to its own freedom. The intensity and force of my desire to capture one of these beings now became prodigious. I avoided my wife—' "

Here the widow heard me falter.

"Please," she commanded, and I saw creeping in her face the completed turn of a sneer.

" '—lest I be depleted of potency at that moment (which might occur in any interval, even, I assumed, in my own bedroom) when I should encounter one of the free souls. I was borne back again and again to the fetid viscosities of the Inlet, borne there as if on the rising stink of my own enduring and tedious putrefaction, the idea of which I could no longer shake off—I envisaged my soul as trapped in my last granule, and that last granule itself perhaps petrified, never to dissolve, and my soul condemned to minister to it throughout eternity! It seemed to me my soul must be released at once or be lost to sweet air forever. In a gleamless dark, struggling with this singular panic, I stumbled from ditch to ditch, strained like a blind dog for the support of solid verticality; and smacked my palm against bark. I looked up and in the black could not fathom the size of the tree —my head lolled forward, my brow met the trunk with all its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gravings. I busied my fingers in the interstices of the bark's cuneiform. Then with forehead flat on the tree, I embraced it with both arms to measure it. My hands united on the other side. It was a young narrow weed, I did not know of what family. I reached to the lowest branch and plucked a leaf and made my tongue travel meditatively along its periphery to assess its shape: oak. The taste was sticky and exaltingly bitter. A jubilation lightly carpeted my groin. I then placed one hand (the other I kept around the tree's waist, as it were) in the bifurcation (disgustingly termed crotch) of that lowest limb and the elegant and devoutly firm torso, and caressed that miraculous juncture with a certain languor, which gradually changed to vigor. I was all at once savagely alert and deeply daring: I chose that single tree together with the ground near it for an enemy which in two senses would not yield: it would neither give nor give in. "Come, come," I called aloud to Nature. A wind blew out a braid of excremental malodor into the heated air. "Come," I called, "couple with me, as thou didst with Cadmus, Rhoecus, Tithonus, Endymion, and that king Numa Pompilius to whom thou didst give secrets. As Lilith comes without a sign, so come thou. As the sons of God came to copulate with women, so now let a daughter of Shekhina the Emanation reveal herself to me. Nymph, come now, come now."

" 'Without warning I was flung to the ground. My face smashed into earth, and a flaky clump of dirt lodged in my open mouth. For the rest, I was on my knees, pressing down on my hands, with the fingernails clutching dirt. A superb ache lined my haunch. I began to weep because I was certain I had been ravished by some sinewy animal. I vomited the earth I had swallowed and believed I was defiled, as it is written: "Neither shalt thou lie with any beast." I lay sunk in the grass, afraid to lift my head to see if the animal still lurked. Through some curious means I had been fully positioned and aroused and exquisitely sated, all in half a second, in a fashion impossible to explain, in which, though I performed as with my own wife, I felt as if a preternatural rapine had been committed upon me. I continued prone, listening for the animal's breathing. Meanwhile, though every tissue of my flesh was gratified in its inmost awareness, a marvelous voluptuousness did not leave my body; sensual exultations of a wholly supreme and paradisal order, unlike any-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing our poets have ever defined, both flared and were intensely satisfied in the same moment. This salubrious and delightful perceptiveness excited my being for some time: a conjoining not dissimilar (in metaphor only; in actuality it cannot be described) from the magical contradiction of the tree and its issuance-of-branch at the point of bifurcation. In me were linked, *in the same instant,* appetite and fulfillment, delicacy and power, mastery and submissiveness, and other paradoxes of entirely remarkable emotional import.

" 'Then I heard what I took to be the animal treading through the grass quite near my head, all cunningly; it withheld its breathing, then snored it out in a cautious and wisplike whirr that resembled a light wind through rushes. With a huge energy (my muscular force seemed to have increased) I leaped up in fear of my life; I had nothing to use for a weapon but—oh, laughable!—the pen I had been writing with in a little notebook I always carried about with me in those days (and still keep on my person as a self-shaming souvenir of my insipidness, my bookishness, my pitiable conjecture and wishfulness in a time when, not yet knowing thee, I knew nothing). What I saw was not an animal but a girl no older than my oldest daughter, who was then fourteen. Her skin was as perfect as an eggplant's and nearly of that color. In height she was half as tall as I was. The second and third fingers of her hands—this I noticed at once—were peculiarly fused, one slotted into the other, like the ligula of a leaf. She was entirely bald and had no ears but rather a type of gill or envelope, one only, on the left side. Her toes displayed the same oddity I had observed in her fingers. She was neither naked nor clothed—that is to say, even though a part of her body, from hip to just below the breasts (each of which appeared to be a kind of velvety colorless pear, suspended from a very short, almost invisible stem), was luxuriantly covered with a flossy or spore-like material, this was a natural efflorescence in the manner of, with us, hair. All her sexual portion was wholly visible, as in any field flower. Aside from these express deviations, she was commandingly human in aspect, if unmistakably flower-like. She was, in fact, the reverse of our hackneyed euphuism, as when we say a young girl blooms like a flower—she, on the contrary, seemed a flower transfigured into the shape of the most stupendously lovely child I had ever seen. Under the smallest

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

push of wind she bent at her superlative waist; this, I recognized, and not the exhalations of some lecherous beast, was the breathlike sound that had alarmed me at her approach: these motions of hers made the blades of grass collide. (She herself, having no lungs, did not "breathe.") She stood bobbing joyfully before me, with a face as tender as a morning-glory, strangely phosphorescent: she shed her own light, in effect, and I had no difficulty in confronting her beauty.

" 'Moreover, by experiment I soon learned that she was not only capable of language, but that she delighted in playing with it. This she literally could do—if I had distinguished her hands before anything else, it was because she had held them out to catch my first cry of awe. She either caught my words like balls or let them roll, or caught them and then darted off to throw them into the Inlet. I discovered that whenever I spoke I more or less pelted her; but she liked this, and told me ordinary human speech only tickled and amused, whereas laughter, being highly plosive, was something of an assault. I then took care to pretend much solemnity, though I was lightheaded with rapture. Her own "voice" I apprehended rather than heard—which she, unable to imagine how we human ones are prisoned in sensory perception, found hard to conceive. Her sentences came to me not as a series of differentiated frequencies but (impossible to develop this idea in language) as a diffused cloud of field fragrances; yet to say that I assimilated her thought through the olfactory nerve would be a pedestrian distortion. All the same it was clear that whatever she said reached me in a shimmer of pellucid perfumes, and I understood her meaning with an immediacy of glee and with none of the ambiguities and suspiciousness of motive that surround our human communication.

" 'Through this medium she explained that she was a dryad and that her name was Iripomonoéià (as nearly as I can render it in our narrowly limited orthography, and in this dunce's alphabet of ours which is notoriously impervious to odoriferous categories). She told me what I had already seized: that she had given me her love in response to my call.

" ' "Wilt thou come to any man who calls?' " I asked.

" ' "All men call, whether realizing it or not. I and my sisters sometimes come to those who do not realize. Almost never, unless for sport. do we come to that man who calls knowingly—he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wishes only to inhabit us out of perversity or boastfulness or to indulge a dreamed-of disgust."

" ' "Scripture does not forbid sodomy with the plants," I exclaimed, but she did not comprehend any of this and lowered her hands so that my words would fly past her uncaught. "I too called thee knowingly, not for perversity but for love of Nature."

" ' "I have caught men's words before as they talked of Nature, you are not the first. It is not Nature they love so much as Death they fear. So Corylylyb my cousin received it in a season not long ago coupling in a harbor with one of your kind, one called Spinoza, one that had catarrh of the lung. I am of Nature and immortal and so I cannot pity your deaths. But return tomorrow and say Iripomonoéià." Then she chased my last word to where she had kicked it, behind the tree. She did not come back. I ran to the tree and circled it diligently but she was lost for that night.

" 'Loveliness, all the foregoing, telling of my life and meditations until now, I have never before recounted to thee or any other. The rest is beyond mean telling: those rejoicings from midnight to dawn, when the greater phosphorescence of the whole shouting sky frightened thee home! How in a trance of happiness we coupled in the ditches, in the long grasses, behind a fountain, under a broken wall, once recklessly on the very pavement, with a bench for roof and trellis! How I was taught by natural arts to influence certain chemistries engendering explicit marvels, blisses, and transports no man has slaked himself with since Father Adam pressed out the forbidden chlorophyll of Eden! Loveliness, Loveliness, none like thee. No brow so sleek, no elbow-crook so fine, no eye so green, no waist so pliant, no limbs so pleasant and acute. None like immortal Iripomonoéià.

" 'Creature, the moon filled and starved twice, and there was still no end to the glorious archaic newness of Iripomonoéià.

" 'Then last night. Last night! I will record all with simplicity.

" 'We entered a shallow ditch. In a sweet-smelling voice of extraordinary redolence—so intense in its sweetness that even the barbaric stinks and wind-lifted farts of the Inlet were overpowered by it—Iripomonoéià inquired of me how I felt without my soul. I replied that I did not know this was my condition. "Oh yes, your body is now an empty packet, that is why it is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so light. Spring." I sprang in air and rose effortlessly. "You have spoiled yourself, spoiled yourself with confusions," she complained, "now by morning your body will be crumpled and withered and ugly, like a leaf in its sere hour, and never again after tonight will this place see you." "Nymph!" I roared, amazed by levitation. "Oh, oh, that damaged," she cried, "you hit my eye with that noise," and she wafted a deeper aroma, a leeklike mist, one that stung the mucous membranes. A white bruise disfigured her petally lid. I was repentant and sighed terribly for her injury. "Beauty marred is for our kind what physical hurt is for yours," she reproved me. "Where you have pain, we have ugliness. Where you profane yourselves by immorality, we are profaned by ugliness. Your soul has taken leave of you and spoils our pretty game." "Nymph!" I whispered, "heart, treasure, if my soul is separated how is it I am unaware?"

" ' "Poor man," she answered, "you have only to look and you will see the thing." Her speech had now turned as acrid as an herb, and all that place reeked bitterly. "You know I am a spirit. You know I must flash and dart. All my sisters flash and dart. Of all races we are the quickest. Our very religion is all-of-a-sudden. No one can hinder us, no one may delay us. But yesterday you undertook to detain me in your embrace, you stretched your kisses into years, you called me your treasure and your heart endlessly, your soul in its slow greed kept me close and captive, all the while knowing well how a spirit cannot stay and will not be fixed. I made to leap from you, but your obstinate soul held on until it was snatched straight from your frame and escaped with me. I saw it hurled out onto the pavement, the blue beginning of day was already seeping down, so I ran away and could say nothing until this moment."

" ' "My soul is free? Free entirely? And can be seen?"

" ' "Free. If I could pity any living thing under the sky I would pity you for the sight of your soul. I do not like it, it conjures against me."

" ' "My soul loves thee," I urged in all my triumph, "it is freed from the thousand-year grave!" I jumped out of the ditch like a frog, my legs had no weight; but the dryad sulked in the ground, stroking her ugly violated eye. "Iripomonoéià, my soul will follow thee with thankfulness into eternity."

" ' "I would sooner be followed by the dirty fog. I do not like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that soul of yours. It conjures against me. It denies me, it denies every spirit and all my sisters and every nereid of the harbor, it denies all our multiplicity, and all gods diversiform, it spites even Lord Pan, it is an enemy, and you, poor man, do not know your own soul. Go, look at it, there it is on the road."

" 'I scudded back and forth under the moon.

" ' "Nothing, only a dusty old man trudging up there."

" ' "A quite ugly old man?"

" ' "Yes, that is all. My soul is not there."

" ' "With a matted beard and great fierce eyebrows?"

" ' "Yes, yes, one like that is walking on the road. He is half bent over under the burden of a dusty old bag. The bag is stuffed with books—I can see their raveled bindings sticking out."

" ' "And he reads as he goes?"

" ' "Yes, he reads as he goes."

" ' "What is it he reads?"

" ' "Some huge and terrifying volume, heavy as a stone." I peered forward in the moonlight. "A Tractate. A Tractate of the Mishnah. Its leaves are so worn they break as he turns them, but he does not turn them often because there is much matter on a single page. He is so sad! Such antique weariness broods in his face! His throat is striped from the whip. His cheeks are folded like ancient flags, he reads the Law and breathes the dust."

" ' "And are there flowers on either side of the road?"

" ' "Incredible flowers! Of every color! And noble shrubs like mounds of green moss! And the cricket crackling in the field. He passes indifferent through the beauty of the field. His nostrils sniff his book as if flowers lay on the clotted page, but the flowers lick his feet. His feet are bandaged, his notched toenails gore the path. His prayer-shawl droops on his studious back. He reads the Law and breathes the dust and doesn't see the flowers and won't heed the cricket spitting in the field."

" ' "That," said the dryad, "is your soul." And was gone with all her odors.

" 'My body sailed up to the road in a single hop. I alighted near the shape of the old man and demanded whether he were indeed the soul of Rabbi Isaac Kornfeld. He trembled but confessed. I asked if he intended to go with his books through the whole future without change, always with his Tractate in his hand, and he answered that he could do nothing else.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" ' "Nothing else! You, who I thought yearned for the earth! You, an immortal, free, and caring only to be bound to the Law!"

" 'He held a dry arm fearfully before his face, and with the other arm hitched up his merciless bag on his shoulder. "Sir," he said, still quavering, "didn't you wish to see me with your own eyes?"

" ' "I know your figure!" I shrieked. "Haven't I seen that figure a hundred times before? On a hundred roads? It is not mine! I will not have it be mine!"

" ' "If you had not contrived to be rid of me, I would have stayed with you till the end. The dryad, who does not exist, lies. It was not I who clung to her but you, my body. Sir, all that has no real existence lies. In your grave beside you I would have sung you David's songs, I would have moaned Solomon's voice to your last grain of bone. But you expelled me, your ribs exile me from their fate, and I will walk here alone always, in my garden"—he scratched on his page—"with my precious birds" —he scratched at the letters—"and my darling trees"—he scratched at the tall side-column of commentary.

" 'He was so impudent in his bravery—for I was all fleshliness and he all floppy wraith—that I seized him by the collar and shook him up and down, while the books on his back made a vast rubbing one on the other, and bits of shredding leather flew out like a rain.

" ' "The sound of the Law," he said, "is more beautiful than the crickets. The smell of the Law is more radiant than the moss. The taste of the Law exceeds clear water."

" 'At this nervy provocation—he more than any other knew my despair—I grabbed his prayer-shawl by its tassels and whirled around him once or twice until I had unwrapped it from him altogether, and wound it on my own neck and in one bound came to the tree.

" ' "Nymph!" I called to it. "Spirit and saint! Iripomonoéià, come! None like thee, no brow so sleek, no elbow-crook so fine, no eye so green, no waist so pliant, no limbs so pleasant and acute. For pity of me, come, come."

" 'But she does not come.

" ' "Loveliness, come."

" 'She does not come.

" 'Creature, see how I am coiled in the snail of this shawl as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

if in a leaf. I crouch to write my words. Let soul call thee lie, but body . . .

" '. . .body . . .

" '. . . fingers twist, knuckles dark as wood, tongue dries like grass, deeper now into silk . . .

" '. . . silk of pod of shawl, knees wilt, knuckles wither, neck . . .' "

Here the letter suddenly ended.

"You see? A pagan!" said Sheindel, and kept her spiteful smile. It was thick with audacity.

"You don't pity him," I said, watching the contempt that glittered in her teeth.

"Even now you don't see? You can't follow?"

"Pity him," I said.

"He who takes his own life does an abomination."

For a long moment I considered her. "You don't pity him? You don't pity him at all?"

"Let the world pity me."

"Goodbye," I said to the widow.

"You won't come back?"

I gave what amounted to a little bow of regret.

"I told you you came just for Isaac! But Isaac"—I was in terror of her cough, which was unmistakably laughter—"Isaac disappoints. 'A scholar. A rabbi. A remarkable Jew!' Ha! He disappoints you?"

"He was always an astonishing man."

"But not what you thought," she insisted. "An illusion."

"Only the pitiless are illusory. Go back to that park, Rebbetzin," I advised her.

"And what would you like me to do there? Dance around a tree and call Greek names to the weeds?"

"Your husband's soul is in that park. Consult it." But her low derisive cough accompanied me home: whereupon I remembered her earlier words and dropped three green houseplants down the toilet; after a journey of some miles through conduits they straightway entered Trilham's Inlet, where they decayed amid the civic excrement.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ANTHONY BURGESS

Letter from England

THIS IS AS GOOD OR AS BAD A TIME AS ANY TO START WRITING—a Sussex Sunday afternoon; the village lying in a torpor of beef, pudding and strong tea; the clouds blowing in from the coast to ensure a dull evening of television and light ale from the larder. I have what seems to be an abscess on my left upper gum, so I have applied a wad of cotton wool soaked in peroxide of hydrogen. I am smoking a small cigar which tastes of peroxide of hydrogen. A starling in the garden is imitating a blackbird. The dog, a hefty border collie, is asleep on his side and groaning in his sleep. I have read all the Sunday papers; this —since they cannot compare for bulk with their American counterparts—did not take long. One of the two cats, grey and inevitably called Dorian, is mewing forlornly with Sunday afternoon ennui.

The village is two miles from Burwash, where Rudyard Kipling lived. His house, an Elizabethan manor called Batemans, is open to the public for a few hours daily, and one may examine Kipling's library and workdesk, or so I am told. I have never been there. I have been, several times, to a pub in Robertsbridge—about three miles away—where Hilaire Belloc, a very Catholic writer, greatly admired the port wine. Gilbert Keith Chesterton, another very Catholic writer but much bigger, greatly admired the Sussex beer. I cannot understand why British writers—and American, too: Robert Frost lived for some time in a cottage a score or so miles away—have found Sussex sympathetic. The people are dour and unliterary. The railway station in my own village of Etchingham ought to be crammed with memories of Kipling coming back from a day in London, perhaps bringing Rider Haggard with him, but the aged railway servants have suppressed such memories, if they ever let such memories take root. In Burwash the shopkeepers remember (or remember their fathers remembering) Kipling's wife as a real old harridan who stopped shopping locally, since the Kipling-signed cheques were hoarded by the payees and sold, much above their face value, to visiting American tourists.

Hastings is fifteen miles away, and this year ought to bring high junketings there, since it is the nine hundredth anniversary of the Norman invasion. But nothing much seems to be in preparation, and the pubs are, mostly, chronically short of ice. This is a dull and unenterprising part of the world, though it can be remarkably loud. The sheep have recently been shorn and they announce, day and night, that they are bare. Bare, they shout. The dawn chorus deafens. Fine days bring out the transistor radios. Our road is full of heavy traffic. It is, in fact, far quieter in Chiswick, London, where I have my other

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

house. I have a London house and a country house, which sounds like writer's opulence. It is really nothing of the sort, since the only rewards of writing are aesthetic ones. It is my wife's skill on the London stock exchange.

Here I am, then, writing. It is the thing I do for a number of hours every day; it is my trade. I come down to Sussex in the summer in order to write a novel, since it is more peaceful here than in London and there are fewer wrong numbers on the telephone. I also review books, and the books I receive for review accumulate on my study floor and on the treads of the stairs until the mere sight of such tokens of literary, or sub-literary, industry inhibits my own creative work. Why bother to write a new novel when the world seems to be full of nothing but new novels? I take a couple of suitcases and cram them with new novels, then I stagger the quarter-mile to the railway station (it is ironical that so many of the new novels can be described as "light") and take them to sell at half-price in London. Up to about two years ago, the villagers, watching me stagger off early in the morning with two suitcases, would say: He's leaving his wife again. Then, one wet day, a suitcase flew open and spilled brilliant new novels all over the road. Then I was supposed to be involved in an obscure crime which was vaguely bookish; something to do with the smuggling of pornography out of Sussex, a very improbable notion.

I travel to London with my suitcases—Etchingham, Stonegate, Wadhurst, Frant, Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge, Sevenoaks, London Bridge, Waterloo, Charing Cross. At Charing Cross I take a taxi up the Strand in the direction of St Paul's Cathedral. There is a bookseller very near Chancery Lane who buys my review copies at half their published price and invariably pays me in cash. This is important, this is the only cash I ever receive from anyone, this is the one segment of my income that escapes the scrutiny and penal impost of Her Majesty's Department of Inland Revenue. This is, to use a once popular army term derived from the Arabic, *buckshee* money. It cries out to be spent on cigars, out-of-season fruits, bottles of *Cordon Bleu* cognac, luncheons at the Café Royal. I become, until the 4:20 train that takes me back to Sussex, a part of Swinging London.

The swingingness of this London has been much exaggerated. In the daytime it manifests itself chiefly in sleazy Soho strip-clubs ("Just startin' now, guv," whispers the man outside), Levantine dope-merchants, and girls wearing mini-skirts. Quite frequently the person I meet for drinks or lunch at the Café Royal is a girl, or young woman, wearing a mini-skirt. My meeting with her has nothing, or little, to do with either her youth or her totally uncoy display of a swathe of thigh while she drinks her Americano or Cuba Libre or orders her cold cucumber soup or asparagus. Our connection is literary—agential, journalistic, filmic, televisual. But, with her, I am made to feel my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

age. The gap between the generations is widening. I am a middle-aged writer whose productions, by an empathetic miracle, occasionally touch the young. Sometimes, at very ecumenical cocktail parties, I meet the young, and some of them say—with that careless generosity which characterises the young—that they have read something of mine and that it is *fabulous,* meaning moderately readable. But, for the most part, we middle-aged are gently excluded from the swinging life. We are short-haired and unacneous, our figures will not take skin-tight costume, our sexual competence is always being called into question. Sadly, we seek the company of our fellow middleaged.

Once a week in London, in an Italian restaurant in Soho, the middle-aged writers meet. We are in our forties, we like to drink, we can afford cigars (perhaps we have all been selling our review copies). We try to avoid talking about the state of literature, which often means the sale of our own books, but invariably—over the Asti with Strega chasers—we come back to the inescapable topic, which is the health of writing and reading in Swinging, but Decadent, England. Perhaps we are sourer about contemporary British writing than its American readers are. Lord Snow is old-fashioned; Golding has plucked the last feathers off the bird of Evil; the Catholic converts are starting to bore. More than anything we deplore the lack of good criticism, which might conceivably help books to be better. Criticism means reviewing in the Sunday papers and the weekly periodicals; it means a sub-craft poorly paid and badly stinted as to permissible wordage; it means that no professional writer, reading his reviews, has much idea as to whether he has written well or ill, since the reviewer is rushed and crowded and driven by all exigencies to say little that is critical at all. The British writer waits for American publication to learn how he is faring: he can trust the thousand-word review. In this sense (and in the sense also of the generosity of his American advances, which far outstrip their British counterparts) he is more and more regarding his primary audience as an American one.

There is something very unhealthy about all this. The British writer is never sure how the British public is taking his work. Hardback sales mean little, since most readers are library-borrowers or willing to wait for paperback publication. But British readers are never willing to tell British authors—by letter or over the telephone—what they think of their work, and in this they are very different from Americans. British reticence can be taken too far; British authors end up with the feeling not that they are addressing a public but that they are engaged—and very remotely at that—in marketing a commodity.

A recent enactment of the British Government is already making authors wonder about the moral value of this commodity. Socialism, to which we are probably committed for a long spell, favours the manual worker rather than the intellectual. More than that, it regards the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

products of the machine (which a typewritten article presumably is not) as somehow morally superior to an idea, a vision, or an interpretation of life. The people of Britain are officially categorised as purveyors of goods or purveyors of services. An employer of purveyors of services is to be taxed at the rate of $3.75 per week per employee; an employer of manufacturers of goods is to receive, from the public fisc, $3.75 per week per employee. It is an incentive and a reward for producing goods, whether these goods be candy-floss, condoms, or heavy machinery. It is the ultimate fulfilment of the pro-materialistic and anti-spiritual philosophy first propounded in the nineteenth century but, one would have thought, now quite outdated. The printer of a book is rewarded for printing it, but the seller of that book is penalised for selling it. The writer is untouched by the law, a neutral body, unless he employs a secretary. A secretary provides a service, so the writer must pay the Government $3.75 a week as a fine for needing that service. One thinks of blind Milton, a remote progenitor of this neo-Cromwellianism, taxed out of using an amanuensis. But he had his daughters, who were presumably unpaid.

It would be unfair to say that the British Government is inimical to art: opera and ballet and orchestras are, however nigglingly, state-subsidised. But, apart from certain minuscule cash awards, the writer is hardly encouraged. Indeed, the traditional distrust of authors can be seen in the twice-yearly Honours List, which admits the inventor of the mini-skirt to the Order of the British Empire (of which the Beatles are mere Members), makes knights of conductors and tenors, but rarely acknowledges the contribution of the writer to the pursuit of British happiness. It is a genuine distrust, even a fear, and it seems to have its roots in the cosseting of Victorian stability, which even the meanest poetaster might disturb. Sullivan got his knighthood early, but Gilbert had to wait until old age. Graham Greene and William Golding, who concern themselves with eschatological matters like Evil, were considered safe enough to be made Companions of Honour. Noel Coward, who is entering serene old age and has done some small service to the British theatre, remains unhonoured; Evelyn Waugh died without the knighthood that was his entitlement.

Does it matter? The British honours system has always been something of a laughing-stock, what with its peerages for those who have served the party, its medals for the retiring heads of typing-pools. But certain awards have to be taken seriously—particularly the Order of Merit, which has been given to composers and scientists with less reserve than to writers. And writers become more and more desperate for some kind of assurance that the work they are doing is more than a mere, and increasingly unsaleable, commodity. Most British writers have forfeited all claims to be considered for the Nobel Prize, which—among practitioners in English—normally goes to Americans. They have a right to ask that the Philistines do not entirely prevail in the smaller community.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is unmanly for writers to whine about their isolation, their exclusion from state honours, their niggardly financial rewards. Nevertheless, there comes a time for all but the biggest operators—those with yachts and no style—to wonder whether the game is worth the candle. Has the novel a future as an artistic *genre* in itself, not merely as the processable stuff of films and television plays? Evidently, fiction (like that of Angus Wilson and Lord Snow) which does not advance the frontiers beyond George Eliot and Anthony Trollope is hardly to be considered as anything more than the dilutions of professionalism —though one may admit the odd grain of contemporary relevance, the minimal modification of contemporary sensibility. The development of the *genre* along the lines of Nabokov's *Pale Fire* or the passionless works of the French anti-novelists is in order for the literary wives of dons, or schoolmasters who write in the evenings, or any other *littérateurs* who are not committed to sales sufficient to provide a living, but there remains a considerable body of professionals who are not quite pot-boiler practitioners and yet not quite members of the avant-garde.

I regard myself as belonging to this group of professionals. I write a novel—every year if I can—partly to earn money, partly to express a fictional idea that demands incarnation and, for the good of my mental health, must achieve it. I have paused in the writing of a new novel in order to set down this letter. Tomorrow I shall start the third chapter of this novel, having satisfied myself that the first two chapters will do. There is a certain excitement in making characters move and talk like real human beings and, at the same time, express in flesh-and-blood terms the intellectual thesis on which the novel is based. But it has to be confessed that one settles to the typewriter with a sigh of weariness. The book will be competent because one has learned the craft, it will amuse, perhaps move, possibly instruct. But where and who are these people who are to be instructed and moved and amused? For whom is one displaying this competence? Certainly not the British reviewers, whose judgements one can write in advance. Is it then the anonymities of the public libraries? Only when they cease to be anonymous and play their part in the process of communication—a dream never to be consummated. One writes, then, for the people one knows, and the people one knows tend to be other writers. Not that the stated judgements of other writers can really be trusted: they either want to offend or not to offend, to hurt or to please. One ends, then, by writing in a void, throwing words into an emptiness. And yet one goes on writing.

One wonders more and more whether Britain is the right ambient for the writer. In both New York and Dublin one has a feeling that writers get drunk together more often, and this is a good thing. There are more parties than in London (there are none in Sussex) and they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are usually very good parties, where there are readers who will talk very frankly about one's books. But the more social life the less actual writing. In Dublin, especially, there is the temptation for writers to talk their books instead of getting them down on paper. Various writers have been driven out of England by taxes, lack of sun, the absence of literary sodality, and set up in the Greek islands or in Tangier. They have often perished of inanition, having nothing to write about except their own past. The British writer ought, despite everything, to stay where he is and suffer with everybody else; his task is to extract a meaning from contemporary suffering. He must take his subject-matter out of the society he knows best, and he must go on learning about that society.

What subject-matter does England provide (or Wales or Scotland or Northern Ireland or the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man)? Not, I would say, the subject-matter of an expansive vision, which, whatever Americans may think, is there in America for the American writer's taking. Some of us got in just in time to record a dying, or heroically relinquished, empire. The transition from free society to welfare state provided material for a few novels, but the theme has lost all its vitality. The *mores* of the young change too rapidly for anything other than journalistic recording. The temptation is to ignore the contemporary surface and concentrate on ideas which exhibit themselves as supra-national—theological or political or historical, sexual relationships which touch the level of myth (a middle-aged man loving a girl in a mini-skirt), the threatened or reaffirmed stasis of the family.

Perhaps this letter from England would be less sad if the weather were better. It is a cloudy still evening now—time for churchgoing, though not many will go. In twenty minutes the pubs will open, but Sunday evening is no time for euphorious drinking. Television sets are being switched on. In Hastings the elderly will be tottering towards bingo sessions. In London the young will be desperately trying to swing against the huge hopelessness of Sunday. This writer will take a swig of brandy (heavily overtaxed) for his gumboil. Work tomorrow, for the writer as for everybody else, though not for the crews of merchant ships, who are still on strike. The organisation of words into meaningful patterns—it represents, against all the odds, a sort of salvation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

IT WAS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE IN ADVANCE what had induced Balanchine—who admires the music of Mozart, Bizet, Chabrier and Stravinsky—to make a ballet out of something as different and bad as Brahms's Piano Quartet Op. 25, and with its badness magnified by Schönberg's excessively and tastelessly busy instrumentation. And while he had, as recently as last year's *Don Quixote,* shown himself able to produce superb dance invention for bad music, the opening Allegro of the Brahms, danced by Melissa Hayden and André Prokovsky, looked like a mere filling out of time with a mechanical use of the Balanchine vocabulary. The filling out of time continued, though with somewhat more attractive movements for Patricia McBride and Conrad Ludlow in the Intermezzo, and a few exquisite details for Allegra Kent in the Andante; and here one saw a first manifestation of real inventive power in the brief but stunning solo for Edward Villella: the large movements in andante tempo with which he filled the stage space in a progression of enormous tension and grandeur. And in the final *Rondo alla Zingarese* the delightful invention in folk dance style that Suzanne Farrell danced enchantingly with Jacques d'Amboise suggested that it may have been this finale which attracted Balanchine to the Brahms work. The tasselled draperies designed by Peter Harvey contributed only their obtrusiveness; and Karinska's costumes were agreeable to the eye, except for the one that made Hayden look dumpy and heavy.

The New York City Ballet's final new work, John Taras' *Jeux,* used the Debussy score that Diaghilev commissioned for the 1912 ballet of Nijinsky. Listening to it by itself, one hears a succession of mere mannerisms of the matured Debussy orchestral style, with no ideas like those of *La Mer, Ibéria* and *Rondes de Printemps;* but it turned out that this operation of mere style worked powerfully as soundtrack for a stage action. In fact it suggested a more powerful stage work than the one Taras provided in his realization of the Nijinsky scenario about a young man who, searching for a lost tennis ball, encounters two emotionally involved young girls, interposes himself between them, wins one, then the other, then both, only to run off in the end in pursuit of another tennis ball. The piece began well, with the music preparing one for Raoul Pène DuBois's fine set of a clearing near a lake, and Villella's leap as he crossed the stage in pursuit of the first tennis ball. But then came the two young girls: one, Allegra Kent, made to look a little absurd by her costume of filmy trouserettes, the other, Melissa Hayden, hardly a young girl, and cos-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tumed to look like a grotesquely oversized Baby Snooks. This made their involvement in the movement devised by Taras somewhat repellent; and for their subsequent involvements with the boy Taras provided the necessary supported turns, arabesques and lifts, which he failed to make fresh, imaginative and distinguished.

In addition to the new works there was a new scene for the rustics in the first act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* in which they began a rehearsal of their play which was disrupted by Puck, who placed on Bottom the ass's head that caused the others to flee in terror. The scene was an improvement in an already superb act; whereas worse than nothing was done for the second act that badly needs improvement. In this act the opening dance of the courtiers is another of the rare instances of Balanchine's seeming to fill out time mechanically; and the first movement of the little *divertissement* is one of the rare instances of his being defeated by poor music. However with the lovely opening section of the second movement of Mendelssohn's little symphony there is the exquisite *pas de deux* of the two soloists, and with the somber middle section the impressive dance of the six boys; but even this dance of the boys was omitted last spring. The performance had distinguished contributions by Villella and Farrell in the first act, and by Kent in her second-act *divertissement* with d'Amboise.

Balanchine also introduced an effective new happening into the first act of *Don Quixote.* While the newly armed knight paced back and forth, Sancho Panza brandished a sword in trial movements whose gigantic shadows appeared on the backdrop, causing the knight, when he excitedly became aware of them, to make futile lunges at them with his spear. Then the gigantic shadows of his own lunges appeared on the backdrop, and he now began to lunge at these. I use the word "happening" because seeing *Don Quixote* again confirmed my opinion that the work is an assemblage of Balanchine happenings, using incidents in the Cervantes book for what are expressions of Balanchine's mind, personality and gifts for dance and theater. These happenings include a number of pieces of marvelous dance invention: Suzanne Farrell's first solo in Act 1; the opening dance of the courtiers and the *divertissements* in Act 2—above all the *pas de deux Mauresque* for Suki Schorer and John Prinz; the supported adagio for Farrell, the solos for Mimi Paul, Marnee Morris, Anthony Blum and Farrell in Act 3. And these are interspersed among pieces of theater invention—some funny, some touching, all wonderfully imagined—of which only the religious procession in the last scene gets to be ineffective and irritatingly boring because of the atrocious Nabokov music that drones on interminably. Except for this the succession of happenings provides an absorbing and exciting artistic experience, especially as they are realized by the dancers I have mentioned and by Richard Rapp and Deni Lamont in their mime roles of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For the rest, one deplored the dropping of four of the greatest Balanchine works—*Concerto Barocco, Symphony in C, The Four Temperaments,* and *Episodes*—too high a price to pay for the new *Brahms-Schönberg Quartet, Jeux* and *Summerspace* (a more reasonable and acceptable price would have been *Con Amore, Piège de Lumière, Ebony Concerto, Irish Fantasy* or *Dim Lustre*). But even without these four, Balanchine's *Apollo, The Prodigal Son, Serenade, Ballet Imperial, La Sonnambula, Divertimento No. 15, Swan Lake, Agon, Liebesliederwalzer, Bugaku, Raymonda Variations, Donizetti Variations, Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux, Meditation, Tarantella, Harlequinade* and a half-dozen others added up to a corpus of creative achievement which—in its mastery of the medium, its imaginative power, its fertility of invention, its variety—is comparable, as no other choreographer's is, with that of the century's great figures in the other arts—with the best of Picasso and Stravinsky. This alone provided, almost every night, the exciting experiences that the visiting Royal and Bolshoi and Kirov provide only with occasional performances of classics like *Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty* and *Giselle*—the ones with particularly distinguished dancers. It is true that Balanchine's *Swan Lake* with Hayden is not what it is with Kent or Violette Verdy or Mimi Paul, and that his *Apollo* with d'Amboise is not what it is with Ludlow or Villella; and the company did present *Swan Lake* with Hayden as well as Kent and Paul, and *Apollo* only with d'Amboise. But the works come through excitingly even with the poorer dancers; and most of the time they were made additionally exciting by Kent, Farrell, Paul, McBride, Schorer, Villella, d'Amboise and Blum, among others.

Farrell added *Swan Lake* to her repertory; and her second performance, which I saw, was something completely and securely achieved and breathtakingly beautiful in her individual style. Paul danced the Jillana role in *Liebesliederwalzer,* giving it her characteristic elegance and distinction; and with the enchanting contributions of Verdy and Farrell and the lovely dancing of McBride, the realizations of this marvelous piece were two of the season's great events. A last-minute substitution gave a lucky audience Verdy's extraordinary performance in *The Firebird.* And John Prinz was an impressive replacement in one of the secondary male roles of *La Valse.*

The company's great male dancer, Villella—great by virtue of what he has beyond mere dazzling technique—exhibited, in his first years, elegance not just in the sense of grace, but in the sense in which mathematicians use the term about a demonstration, meaning the economy and simplicity resulting from the elimination of everything superfluous. He affected one powerfully even when he stood motionless at the side of the stage watching his partner's movement in the center, or when he moved toward her very simply and with the minimum gesture of arm and hand. In those days he brought to mind the similar

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

elegance of Igor Youskevitch; but whereas Youskevitch retained his economy and simplicity to the very end, Villella has in the last two years exhibited an increasing and disturbing tendency toward superfluous elaboration and complication. It began, as I recall it, with an ardently weaving body as he approached his partner, a more elaborate movement of the arm ending in an excessive curling of wrist, hand and fingers. And he now no longer stands still: in *Donizetti Variations* last spring, while his partner danced alone, he kept moving about the stage with his arms going like semaphores. This was not the scene-stealing of an Eglevsky: Villella is a wholly generous partner and serious artist; and what he did was, I am sure, the result of an attempt to make his performance better. And that, I am equally sure, is the explanation of his heavy italicizing, in *Bugaku,* of the movements that had more impressive dignity and nobility as he did them with unemphatic simplicity and strength the first years.

An additional reason for regretting the absence of *Concerto Barocco* from the season's repertory was the publication in the programs of several passages from Edwin Denby's 1949 collection of his dance criticism, *Looking at the Dance,* including one about the adagio movement of *Barocco* in which Denby described the detail of two of its greatest moments. The passage would have enabled people in the audiences to see what otherwise they might not have seen; and in this way they would also have learned what a real critic is and does: that he is the professional spectator with powers of perception which the non-professional doesn't have; and that he begins by perceiving what his reader may not have noticed, then describes it in a way that enables the reader to perceive it—the result being in effect that the reader operates with the critic's perceptions, sees through his eyes, hears with his ears. Accurate perception—the ability to see or hear what is placed before him—is not the only equipment of the critic: intellectual and moral discipline enter into the operation too. But it is the first, basic and essential equipment, without which the operation cannot begin; and the primary reason for the bad criticism that fills newspapers and magazines is that accurate perception—the ability merely to see or hear what is set before the critic—is exceedingly rare.

Some magazine articles of the English dance critic Clive Barnes a few years ago revealed him as one who could see—not as well as Denby saw, but well enough to create the expectation last fall that he would be the dance critic *The New York Times* and its readers have needed all these years. But his performances in *The Times* revealed his lack of the discipline I referred to a moment ago. The critic must be able not only to see but to hold his pen strictly to what he has seen; but Barnes, in addition to doing his reporting job, has been concerned with being bright, funny and lovable; and the objection to this is that when a critic's eye is partly on the effect he wants to make, it is by that much less on the thing he is ostensibly writing about. Thus, bubbling

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

along and throwing out little *obiter dicta* to amuse, to please, to shock, Barnes peppered his reviews with nonsense. He wrote, for example, that "Miss Hayden dances like a prima ballerina should," and credited her, in a review I have misplaced, with the loveliest arms in ballet. Or he admired Verdy's glittering performance in *The Firebird* for its "soft radiance." Or he described in Farrell's dancing in *Don Quixode* its "sweet perfection and terribly touching immaturity." Or he urged Ballet Theatre to scrap its distinguished Eugene Berman production of *Giselle* and reinstate the pre-1948 Lucinda Ballard production (which he can hardly have seen). And in addition to such statements in his reviews of particular ballets and performances there were the ones in his general think-pieces. I recall in one such article a statement to the effect that Balanchine and the New York City Ballet badly needed competition—which made no discernible sense in relation to the company's repertory and performances: what were the shoddy works Balanchine had been content to get by with in the absence of the competition that would have compelled him to create masterpieces?

And so, in his *New Republic* review of Denby's new collection of his critical writing since 1949, Barnes referred,[1] incredibly, to John Martin as "a dance critic who might be regarded as Denby's peer." And he wrote about the collection: "It is even better than his first" —which was the gracious thing to say, but not true. "Indeed it is probably . . . the best book of dance criticism ever written"—which it is not. The best book of dance criticism ever written was the first collection, *Looking at the Dance,* which took its place next to the collections of the best music and theater criticism ever written—those of Bernard Shaw and Stark Young. The new collection includes some writing as fine as that of *Looking at the Dance*—notably a description of Markova operating with lessened powers in 1952 that creates images of her movements as vivid as those created by the writing about Markova in the earlier book. But the regular reviewing of performances that Denby did, first in *Modern Music* and then in the *Herald Tribune* during the war years, yielded a far greater amount of such vivid descriptive writing about ballets and dancers for inclusion in *Looking at the Dance* than the infrequent writing he has done since 1949 provided for the new collection. And the new book includes a great deal —involved in style, or obscure, or excessively technical—that does *not* enable one to see the things it is describing. But its best certainly is something not to miss; and in publishing it Horizon Press has done the public a valuable service—an even more valuable one if the publication of this book should lead to the reissuing of *Looking at the Dance.*

Some years ago the respected Viking Press published an anthology

[1] DANCERS, BUILDINGS AND PEOPLE IN THE STREETS, by *Edwin Denby.* Horizon Press. $5.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of writing about music to which it gave prestige with the name of its compiler, Jacques Barzun, but which revealed his astounding lack of any sense for what was worth collecting into files and emptying into books, and what was not. Now the Metropolitan Opera Association's departure from its old home is the occasion for Viking to publish a picture book with accompanying text[2] principally about the building's "seventy-five years of major opera events and personages, on and off the stage," but also about other events in the building and contemporaneous events outside. And again the value of the book is lessened considerably by the fact that the editors of *Opera News* who put it together know what to publish in a magazine that is an official medium of information, publicity and promotion for the Metropolitan's productions, but not what to publish in a book that is to provide a record of what was presented in those seventy-five years. I would contend, for myself, that a photograph of Siepi gargling in his dressing room, or Bing backstage watching Charles Anthony sing the offstage song in *Tristan,* or Bing coming up the steps of the subway station, is something to publish in *Opera News* but not to publish in the book; but even if I were to defer to the different view on this point, I would contend that such material should not be given space that was not given to some of the essential photographic documentation of what has been presented on the Metropolitan's stage; and I would therefore fault the compilers of the book for reprinting those photographs of Siepi and Bing from *Opera News* and not the ones of Eugene Berman's scenery and costumes for *Don Giovanni,* the most distinguished and beautiful I can recall seeing in opera anywhere. Even someone who does not, as I do, object to the numerous photographs like those of Siepi and Bing, must object to the omissions in the essential documentation: the omissions of even the best of Berman's work—his *Don Giovanni, Rigoletto* and *Otello*—from a documentation of new productions that includes things as poor as the Colonnello *Lucia* and the last scene of the O'Hearn *Meistersinger;* the omission of Steber's great Donna Anna or Fiordiligi from a documentation of singers' achievements that includes Corelli and Merrill in *Andrea Chénier* and Kirsten's Cio-Cio-San.

So with the sections on the earlier periods. It would be enough to mention that although there is a photograph of Marion Talley's Philine in *Mignon* there is none of Chaliapin's Boris Godunov. But I must add that there is none of the great Margaret Matzenauer in a single one of her roles, none of Fremstad's historic Isolde, or of the Leider Isolde, or of Schorr's Hans Sachs, or of Steber's Countess in the superb *Figaro* of the forties (there are photographs of *Peter Ibbetson* and *The Emperor Jones* but not of this *Figaro*). On the occasion of the *Rosenkavalier* of two or three years ago the editors of *Opera*

[2] THE GOLDEN HORSESHOE: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE, by *Frank Merkling, John W. Freeman* and *Gerald Fitzgerald,* with *Arthur Solin.* Viking Press. $16.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

News published a photograph of the enchanting Sophie that Elisabeth Schumann contributed to the performances in 1914-15; but in the book they don't so much as mention her name. But there *are* photographs of Melchior and Pons as an apache couple at a charity affair, Bodanzky and Schorr playing cards in a restaurant, Astaire and Rogers in *Top Hat,* the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Airflow car, contestants in a dance marathon, Heywood Broun distributing bread in 1930, the Gish sisters in *Orphans of the Storm,* J. P. Morgan assaulting a news photographer.

As for the accompanying text, if anyone should say that one cannot ask for a realistic appraisal of the Bing operation from people whose regular work is promotion of that operation, I would answer that their appraisal of the Gatti-Casazza period is equally remote from *its* inglorious realities.

Flagstad's own fascinating and moving account of her life and career, as she told it some years ago in *The Flagstad Manuscript,* is now supplemented by the memoir of Edwin McArthur,[3] who speaks with the knowledge he acquired as her accompanist throughout her American career and as the valued and trusted friend he came to be for her.

The additional detail he gives about her as an artist merely amplifies her account; but about her as a person he tells us much that is new. Her own statement was: "I am not an artist except when I am dealing with art, and when I am not dealing with art I am the most commonplace person in the world." McArthur's is: "She was sophisticated in her art. She was completely unsophisticated as a person." And the lack of personal sophistication meant that in her art "her understanding was sure, but intuitive"—which is to say, not intellectual, so that "when a profoundly analytic article about her portrayal of this or that character appeared, she seldom had any idea what the author was talking about." And though as a person she had a basic "native simplicity," in which "rare sensitivity and wisdom were rooted," this was only one element in a very complex make-up. Hence the contradictions McArthur reports—of an extraordinarily and touchingly generous and thoughtful person who on occasion was ruthlessly inconsiderate and cruel; an intensely loyal person who dropped earlier friends—even some who had helped her in her worst hours—for more glamorous later ones; a diffident and shy person whose consciousness of her prima donna's power made her bold in its exercise. And I will add one contradiction which McArthur doesn't mention—of a wonderfully honorable and decent person who, in one situation, did something shockingly immoral.

This happened in the course of Flagstad's attempts to help McArthur achieve a career as a conductor—something she didn't speak of in her book but he tells about in his. Being in a position to dic-

[3] FLAGSTAD, by *Edwin McArthur.* Knopf. $6.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tate the terms of her appearances, she had McArthur engaged to conduct for her by RCA Victor and by opera companies in Chicago and San Francisco. There was, he says, no thought at this time of the Metropolitan, where "Bodanzky had brought in the talented young Erich Leinsdorf . . . as his associate" and there was therefore "no room for another conductor and certainly no place for me." But when Bodanzky died and Leinsdorf took over, Flagstad thought the entire Wagner repertory was a heavy burden for so young a conductor, and therefore felt justified in suggesting that McArthur be given an opportunity—if only the opportunity of one performance in which to demonstrate his sufficient competence for further performances or his lack of it. She felt also that as someone who had saved the Metropolitan's life in 1935 she might ask this one favor in return; but McArthur mentions that one of the exercises of her prima donna's power that gave her satisfaction was dictating to RCA Victor and the managers in Chicago and San Francisco on his behalf; and Edward Johnson's resistance may well have resulted in part from resentment of her use of her position in this way with him. In the end he was compelled to surrender to her superior power in a situation in which he had to have additional performances from her and could obtain them only by agreeing to McArthur's conducting three times in New York and twice in Boston and Cleveland. But before the controversy reached this conclusion, there was the incident McArthur doesn't mention. Flagstad and Melchior, who was supporting her campaign for McArthur, made a joint complaint, which was published in the press, about the technical deficiencies of Leinsdorf's conducting that the singers said made them feel insecure in their performances with him (I believe one of their charges was that he didn't give them their cues clearly). Thus Flagstad's zeal in her fight for McArthur led her to attempt to injure Leinsdorf, and to do this with a false accusation; for in fact, while Leinsdorf was no more interesting a musician then than now, he was completely competent in the purely technical operation of conducting an orchestra and singers through a performance. And to say that Flagstad was led to do this by excessive zeal in what she considered a good cause, is not to explain how for any reason so honorable and decent a person could have allowed herself to do something so monstrously wrong.

Some of the additional detail is about Flagstad's return to German-occupied Norway in 1941 and the trouble this got her into after the war. McArthur thinks he was right in not, at the time, answering the falsehoods about this with the truth that he knew; but I think he was wrong. A formal statement by McArthur and Marks Levine, Flagstad's manager, in *The Times* and similar papers, in 1941, informing the public that she had gone to Norway at her husband's request and to see her family, that she had gone by way of Germany because she couldn't accept the alternative of crossing the Pacific and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Siberia, that all her travel arrangements, including the obtaining of the German transit visa, had been handled by her management, which had dealt with the German consulate in the same routine manner as with the others; a similar statement in these newspapers in 1947 informing the public that Flagstad had stayed in Norway because she had felt she should be with her family and her people, that she had lived there as a private person and had sung in public only in Switzerland and Sweden, that no official or unofficial charge of any wrongdoing had been made against her in Norway—these statements might not have silenced the Walter Winchells, but they would have corrected the misconceptions in the minds of readers of what those newspapers did publish—misconceptions which led me to express reservations about Flagstad's first post-war concerts here that I would not have expressed if McArthur and Levine had published the facts they knew.

Notes on Contributors

Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

JAMES DICKEY's latest book, *Buckdancer's Choice,* was the recent winner of the National Book Award for Poetry.

ROGER SALE, a frequent contributor, is in the Department of English at the University of Washington. He spent the past summer directing an "Upward Bound" project on the University campus.

An expanded edition of LINCOLN KIRSTEIN's *Rhymes of a PFC* was issued in August by New Directions.

LAURENCE LIEBERMAN is in the Department of English of the College of the Virgin Islands in St. Thomas.

SAMUEL L. ALBERT* lives in Boston where he teaches at the Boston Center for Adult Education and is employed in an insurance firm.

CALVIN BEDIENT* teaches modern British literature at Emory University and is at work on a book on George Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, and E. M. Forster.

JOHN HOLLOWAY is currently being appointed Reader in Modern English at Cambridge. His early autobiography, *A London Childhood,* appears this year.

D. J. ENRIGHT,* born in England in 1920, has taught English literature in Egypt, England, Japan, West Berlin and Thailand, and is at present Professor of English in the University of Singapore. He has published five volumes of poetry in England, of which the last is *The Old Adam* (1965), four novels and several books of criticism.

LANE DUNLOP* is a Brooklyn-born poet who lives in New York. He is at work on a translation of Raymond Roussel's *La Poussière de Soleils* for Calder & Boyars Ltd.

(continued on page 514)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEYMOUR RUDIN

The Criticism of B. H. Haggin

THROUGH APPROXIMATELY FORTY YEARS as a music critic, B. H. Haggin has celebrated—in the music, the performance, the criticism that has meant most to him—a quality that Chekhov once defined as follows: "When a man uses the minimum of movements for a given action, *that* is grace."

In *The Listener's Musical Companion* (1956, revised 1959), Haggin describes Mozart, whom he regards as "the most extraordinary musical artist who ever lived," as being capable of "expressing powerful emotions . . . with an economy and conciseness analogous to what the mathematician calls elegance." And in the same book, paraphrasing a remark on Mozart by the English critic W. J. Turner, he defines the comparable grace and mastery of Berlioz' operation—in one of the songs of *Les Nuits d'Eté*—by observing, "I doubt that anyone has ever produced a greater effect on the mind with so little impingement on the senses."

In 1948 Haggin wrote as follows of a televised Toscanini-NBC Symphony concert: "The continuity in the moment-to-moment flow of the performance is produced by a continuous activity—a moment-to-moment exercise of the utmost attentiveness, concentration and control . . . . not only is every movement equal to the situation but it never is more than equal to it." And in 1964 he recalled that he had not always appreciated Toscanini's conducting, having preferred—as late as 1933—Koussevitzky's way with Beethoven, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky, but that he had come later "to appreciate and require plastic economy and subtlety in performance."

What Haggin has appreciated and required in music and performance, he has appreciated and required, persistently and sometimes belligerently, in criticism as well. Theatre and music critics, unlike many of their literary colleagues, have been notably unwilling to criticize one another's work. George Jean Nathan, an honorable exception among the former, observed optimistically over thirty years ago that "the healthiest promise of American criticism is the increasing criticism of criticism." Though Nathan himself practiced what he preached and demonstrated the tonic value of the operation, most drama critics have not followed his lead. But almost alone among music critics, Haggin has constantly reviewed the work of others in the field, dead and living. He has expounded and praised such as Berlioz, Shaw, Tovey, Turner, and (with reservations) Thomson, and has exposed and condemned such as Gilman, Downes, Einstein, Lang, and Schonberg. And what he has admired in the former group can be determined from his characterization—in the *Companion*—of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

certain of Tovey's critical formulations as "often epigrammatic in their concentration and clarification of sense and their impact and brilliance," and of Turner as a critic who "writes with a poet's precision of statement, in the expression of a poet's insights." Such have been Haggin's requirements: the epigrammatist's concentration and clarification of sense, the poet's precision of statement, or—to apply to criticism what Haggin said of Toscanini's conducting style in the best book yet written about the Italian master (*Conversations with Toscanini,* 1959)—the "economy that [is] a form of honesty in relation to the material and situation and [gives] the operation a moral quality." And he has for about four decades filled his own specifications, has been—with a consistency that is still astonishingly little appreciated—the most distinguished American music critic of his time.

Fanatically consistent in his devotion to the best in music and in writing about music, master of a style as individual, as immediately identifiable as—say—Nathan's in his area or James Agee's in his, Haggin has nevertheless written more than one kind of music criticism. It was from *A Book of the Symphony* (1937) that I first came to learn something about his precision, his fastidiousness, his usefulness as a guide through a musical experience. Here he operates as a close reader of the scores of some major works in the standard symphonic repertoire, a reader whose identification and explication of musical themes offer clarifications that the listener may "hear back" into the works with enriched perception and pleasure. Haggin is fond of quoting with approval a statement by E. M. Forster on the purpose of criticism: "It considers the [art object] in itself as an entity, and tells us what it can about its life." One of the several points at which Haggin has used this remark is in his discussion in the *Companion* of the illuminations provided by Tovey's charting of the course of events in certain great works. As one who has read some of Tovey with profit, I can report that the *Essays in Musical Analysis* —with all their insights, elucidations of structure, sometimes masterly formulations of general principle—often leave the technically untrained reader-listener far behind. (In this connection I am reminded that Haggin once referred to me in a letter to THE HUDSON REVIEW, though not by name, as "musically uneducated.") But *A Book of the Symphony* and, even more, certain sections of *Music for the Man Who Enjoys Hamlet* (1944, revised 1960) and the *Companion* endure for their accuracy, their usefulness to the "musically uneducated" listener in what they tell him about the inner life of musical objects.

One feature of *A Book of the Symphony* has inevitably not endured: the pinpointing, by an elaborate measurement system involving the use of a ruler, of details on now obsolete 78 rpm records of the symphonies discussed. The careful effort expended in this correlation of analyses of the printed scores with references to details on the records—an attempt, that is, to help the untrained listener

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

learn as he listens—is characteristic of Haggin's work; he made similar correlations in *Music for the Man Who Enjoys Hamlet,* and I know of no comparable effort by any other music critic. And the care and knowledge exemplified by this effort are evident also in another type of criticism that Haggin has practiced with unflagging vitality —in his survey entitled *Music on Records* (1938, revised several times thereafter), in his record columns over the years for *The Nation* and more recently *The New Republic* and *The Yale Review,* in the critical discographies in both the *Companion* and *Toscanini.*

Haggin operates in some of his books as the point-to-point analyst of musical structures, textures, and meanings. In most of his record reviewing, on the other hand, he operates as the discerning judge of quality in music and performance, the sharp-eared reporter on audio engineering, the practical guide to the increasingly bewildered record buyer as to what to acquire, what to avoid, and why. In this he affirms and demonstrates both the subjectivity and the validity of his approach. "All these evaluations," he wrote in 1941 in reference to his judgments in *Music on Records,* "represent, inevitably, my judgment of what the meaning of the work is, and in what form in sound the meaning is or is not realized. But that does not mean they are arbitrary, or without validity for anyone else. Music is not a mere spinning of notes, performance not a mere nimbleness of fingers, criticism not a mere turning of thumbs up or down." He has always conceived of the critic as one who—with his more cultivated taste, keener perception, broader experience—can direct his reader to the best in music and performance, can point out what constitutes excellence in composition and interpretation, and can thus help him refine his own perceptions and develop his own standards. The useful critic, he has written with deceptive simplicity, is "the person who has listened to music with the capacity to hear what he has listened to, and with insights that enable him to point out in the music things which [the reader] would not perceive for [himself]." And he has conceived of the reader as one who learns, by trial and error, whether a particular critic has the kind of response that can be trusted, the kind of ability in making and supporting evaluations that qualifies him to be a mentor on what to hear and an explicator of what has been heard.

Having worked according to such principles, Haggin has—as he has sometimes, apparently not without satisfaction, admitted—irritated some of his readers over the years. Finding some of Bach's music to represent a skillful but uninspired exercise of prodigious technical powers, and therefore feeling it his duty to warn the prospective record buyer against being seduced by the composer's awesome reputation, he offered the following option to the reader of *Music on Records:* "He is free to try one of Bach's exercises in writing for unaccompanied violin that I warn against, and discover that he should have listened to me." It was presumably this kind of writing that once

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

led Toscanini to remark to his son Walter, as Haggin has reported, "He [Haggin] writes like God: he knows what is good music and what is bad music. *I* do not know what is good music and what is bad music; but *he* knows." And readers considerably less knowledgeable than Toscanini have found some of Haggin's pronouncements uncomfortably Olympian, some of his tastes and judgments hard to reconcile with their own experience: his dismissal of much of Bach—as noted—as proficient but tedious note-spinning; his condemnation, after a period of youthful Brahms-worship, of most of that composer's work as empty bombast; his rejection of all of Ravel and Puccini as sheer trash; and, conversely, his enthusiasm for the Tchaikovsky symphonies.

Most notable, perhaps, among the aspects of Haggin's criticism that have puzzled or exasperated some of his readers has been his aversion to the bulk of contemporary music. Since the twenties he has reviewed not only records but the New York opera and concert scene—selected reviews of live performances comprise much of *Music in the Nation* (1949) and *Music Observed* (1964)—and he has demonstrated consistently his distaste for what he described in 1941 as "the fluent aridities, the technically masterful uglinesses and horrors of Hindemith, Bartók, Berg, Schönberg, and their lesser contemporaries." Only since the late forties has he found good words for anything of Stravinsky's after *Le Sacre,* and as to other twentieth-century composers, Prokofiev, Bloch, Britten, Thomson, and Copland are among the few who have claimed his attention and elicited even qualified praise. Reviewing Constant Lambert's *Music Ho!* with approval in 1944, Haggin observed that the book, which condemned most twentieth-century music, would "come as an enormous relief—the relief of knowing, after we had been all but persuaded otherwise, that two and two do make four, the sun does rise in the east, and modern music is as sterile and warped and stunted and horrid as it seems." It is hard to believe that Haggin had ever been "all but persuaded" that there was much good in contemporary music; he has been far too firm about it for that, despite this characteristically honest and disarming avowal of 1947: "Some of the kind of music by Stravinsky in which I used to hear only 'expertly contrived aridity and ugliness' I have recently begun to find interesting and enjoyable—and nobody could be more surprised at this than myself." As to more recent music, I know of no Haggin comments on such as Boulez or Stockhausen or Cage, but I can imagine what their tenor might be.[1]

Virgil Thomson once gently referred to Haggin as "no plugger of contemporary music"—a remarkable understatement by a distin-

[1] Haggin has recently noticed Boulez' music to the extent of writing that *Doubles* "made no sense" to him, but he has also noticed and praised highly Boulez' powers as a conductor in—among other things—Webern's *Six Pieces,* in which Haggin has come to hear some meaningful expressiveness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

guished fellow critic, who nevertheless also recognized Haggin's unique powers (as Haggin has recognized Thomson's as both critic and composer). As one who has tried, in conversation with Haggin, to explain why I value certain music by Bartók, Berg, Webern, Ives, even late Puccini, that he does not, I have been able to confirm my conviction that his position is not capricious or arbitrary. It is the result of careful attention to modern music with ears that, sincere effort notwithstanding, cannot become attuned to most of it, with a mind that does not travel in the paths it explores. (In the case of Puccini, it is not, of course, "modernism" that he deplores; it is what he regards as cheapness.) Following his own suggestion to his readers, I discount his judgments—or try to—when I find that my ears yield different reactions, my mind different judgments; the discount leaves me able to profit by the overwhelming bulk of his writing—the sanest, the sharpest, the most consistently readable and convincing that I know in the field.

What makes Haggin's criticism so extraordinary—its acuteness of perception and insight, its precision of statement—is best experienced not in his attacks, however bold and refreshing they often are, on certain composers, performers, musical institutions, fellow critics. It has indeed been enormously salutary over the years to have Haggin point out—cogently and vigorously, if sometimes repetitively and excessively—the pretentiousness and sentimentality in Brahms, the affectation and mannerism in Horowitz, the venalities in the operation of some radio networks and concert managements, the evasions and distortions in the criticism of Gilman, Downes, Lang. But it has been even more salutary to have his analyses of the wonderful details in a Mozart concerto or a Berlioz song or a Verdi aria, his appreciations of style and sound in a performance by Toscanini or Schnabel or Flagstad or Louis Armstrong, his tributes to genuine critical power and grace in the writing of Shaw or Turner or Dent. Mark Van Doren once wrote of Haggin that "there is no critic as illuminating, none as infectious when it comes to praise of masterpieces." And one might add that the praise has often been infectious *because* it has been illuminating—because it has been supported by a rigorously accurate notation of the musical elements in the masterpieces and of their expressive effects. When Haggin writes that "the first movement of K. 595 [Mozart's Piano Concerto # 27] . . . stands apart from the other concertos, and in fact from everything else, in its late-in-life calm (e.g. the opening statement of the violins, punctuated by the strange calls of the winds), with which it conveys intimations of agony that preceded calm (e.g. the poignantly altered repetition of the violins' [phrase quoted in musical notation] a few moments later)—so that as a piece of late writing by Mozart it has something like the character of a late work of Beethoven, or Schubert's Piano Sonata in B flat," he says something exact and useful about the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

music, as well as about its relation to other great music. When he offers a line-by-line, phrase-by-phrase commentary on *Les Nuits d'Eté,* the reader may return to the music ready to hear and understand its vocal and orchestral subtleties as he had not been before. When he describes Flagstad's singing of Bach arias as "an emission of lustrous and beautifully shaped vocal sound that is as natural as speech," or Louis Armstrong's cornet accompaniment of Bessie Smith's singing as "a progression of delicate, florid and derisive comment that gets to be hilariously funny," the reader may feel that he has had expressed for him—more clearly, economically, tellingly than he could have done himself—his reactions to the performance. And so also with the music criticism of Berlioz or Turner or Shaw, about the last of whom Haggin once observed that "he used all his resources of knowledge, taste and wit in the process of dealing rigorously with the material as it required to be dealt with; whereas the others [most music critics] use the material to show their knowledge, taste and wit."

I have indicated that I regard Haggin's inability to appreciate what is meaningful and moving in some modern music as a limitation; it is not his only one. His tendency to repeat a phrase or a formulation that he has found useful is likely to become puzzling and wearisome to a faithful reader; it is especially wearisome, perhaps, when the formulation is a borrowed one. One begins to wonder, for example, whether Forster's admittedly cogent statement of the function of criticism deserves as much use as Haggin makes of it, or whether Tovey's observation that the inequalities in Schubert are "relaxations of his powers" calls for quotation or paraphrase in as many contexts as Haggin finds for it. It is doubtless appropriate for him to note, in the *Companion,* that "the one phrase of the late Otis Ferguson that has remained in my memory is his characterization of a Beiderbecke performance years ago: 'as fresh and glistening as creation itself.'" But one may wonder whether he might not thereupon have done better, later in the same book, than to describe a Toscanini recording of Dvorak's Symphony # 5[2] as making "the battered work 'as fresh and glistening as creation itself,'" or, still later in the same book, another Toscanini recording (of Tchaikovsky's Symphony # 6) as giving us "the work 'as fresh and glistening as creation itself.'"

Haggin can be puzzling in other ways. Having read, in a 1951 article reprinted in 1964 in *Music Observed,* Haggin's condemnation of Ernest Newman for wrongly attributing "fatuity and malice" to the nineteenth-century Viennese critic Hanslick—Haggin goes on to observe that Hanslick's judgments "reveal great knowledge and understanding and thorough preparation . . . in support of excellent critical perception" and that "if there is any 'fatuity and malice' it would appear to be not in the comments of Hanslick but in their misrepresentation by Newman"—one is hardly prepared to find, in the

[2] Now identified as Symphony #9—that is, of course, the familiar *New World.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1959 edition of the *Companion,* a reference to "the venomous critic Hanslick." My reading of Hanslick, incidentally, leads me to conclude that he could be venomous in dealing with Wagner (who thereupon caricatured him as Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger*), but that most of his writing is as solid and perceptive as Haggin notes; I wish Haggin had made this clear. But Haggin's repetitiveness and inconsistency are occasional—very occasional for a critic of forty years' service. One may return again and again to his writing—from articles of the twenties to the 1964 "Postscripts" in *Music Observed*—with refreshment, with renewed and increased delight in details of individual pieces, with confirmed respect for the massive total achievement.

It should be observed about Haggin's dissenting judgments that he has usually supported them by specific references to musical facts, that the dissents derive from application of consistent esthetic principles. His disesteem for some of Bach's music, for example, results from his demand for melodic freshness, for rhythmic and harmonic originality rather than mere technical expertise. He quotes Ernest Newman's formulation approvingly: "The same formula lay ready to Bach's hand on a hundred occasions; but the inspiration that could vivify and deify the formula was not always at his command. . . . These jogging rhythms, these easy melodic embroideries of an obvious harmonic sequence are . . . only his workmanlike verse, not his poetry." And Haggin underlines the requirement of thematic substance by noting its absence in a Bach violin sonata, in which he perceives "only an external pattern of eloquence . . . a mere wriggling about in which I have been able to hear no real eloquence of content." In most of Brahms, similarly, he hears "the effort to produce the sound of great emotions that are not genuinely felt and to elaborate sounds out of sounds by mere technical formula (for example, the inevitable sawing away in cross rhythms in development sections)." And the principle that successful musical creation requires disciplined economy as well as inspiration is exemplified in another comment on Brahms: "The superb song 'Botschaft' exhibits the genuine emotional impulse of a lyricist, a creator of small forms; [and] the *Variations on a Theme of Haydn* is one of the fine works the small-scale artist produces when he employs his technical skill to say the one small thing a number of different ways."

When, on the other hand, Haggin finds genuine creative power and mastery in certain frequently denigrated composers such as Chopin and Tchaikovsky, his specific judgments derive from the same requirements: original thematic substance, fresh and economical development of this substance, precise suiting of musical means to expressive ends. "Listening to one of [Tchaikovsky's] ballet scores," he writes, ". . . listening, that is, to the canvas, so to speak, being filled in with detail, we hear in the operation a wonderful precision and taste in the use of the entire complex of musical line, color, texture and mass.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And we hear also this mastery of the medium serving dramatic and imaginative powers of a high order—the powers revealed for example in the ominous figure that interrupts the opening melodic passage of *Swan Lake* and is developed with increasing tension over plucked bass-notes and sustained brass-notes." And his demand for comparable quality in interpretation leads him to go on to maintain that only in such rare performances as Toscanini's and Cantelli's are Tchaikovsky's precision and taste properly conveyed to the listener, that "it is the traditional overstatement in performance that converts drama and intensity into the melodrama and hysteria for which Tchaikovsky is looked down upon."

In the mid-thirties Haggin began an article on Balanchine by writing, "Ballet is not my field, but I think I may speak, without presuming, of aspects of George Balanchine's work that have delighted me." He has continued to write about ballet—his HUDSON REVIEW chronicles, in recent years, have regularly covered ballet as well as concert and opera performances—and has made it one of his fields in a way that quite belies his disclaimer. Indeed, one may question whether there has been, since Edwin Denby's retirement from regular reviewing, a more acute, better informed, solider ballet critic than Haggin.[3] His response to the endlessly inventive, uniquely elegant art of Balanchine led him in 1948 to the conclusion that the great choreographer stood out above any other living creative artist. And it is in his response to the coherence, economy, and imagination of Balanchine's best work—from the 1928 *Apollo,* which, he characteristically admitted recently, "baffled [him] completely [the] first time with its originality of movement and metaphor," to such works of the forties as *Concerto Barocco* and *Orpheus* and such a more recent one as *Agon*—that Haggin has functioned most valuably as a dance commentator. He once compared Balanchine's operation in a ballet to Hugo Wolf's in a song, observing that "the music in the Wolf song takes shape around the words as it points up the meaning; the movement in the Balanchine ballet fits among, around and across the notes of the music like an additional counterpoint that completes the texture and in so doing gives it an additional significance." As I have again and again found myself able to hear and absorb a piece of music more meaningfully by "hearing back" into it an analysis of Haggin's, so have I found myself watching one or another work in the New York City Ballet repertoire with increased response to, and delight in, the operations of which he has made me aware. To which might be added the point that his disclosure of the elegance and imagination in Balanchine's work has also made me more aware, by contrast, of the absence of these qualities in much of the work of lesser artists—in that of Ashton, for example, or Taras.

[3] But there is excellent dance criticism in Denby's recent book *Dancers, Buildings, and People in the Streets* (1965).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Despite its limitations and oddities, Haggin's criticism constitutes a major and lasting accomplishment. He has been praised by critics as discerning in their various ways as Stark Young, Dwight Macdonald, Randall Jarrell, Irving Howe, but he has not—over the years—been given anything like his due; and from music critics and musicians he has, on occasion, been given shockingly less than his due—as in some of the reviews of *Music Observed*. He is unpopular with most other music critics, and his readership, though often faithful, enthusiastic, even worshipful, has never been large. (Except for a period as commentator on radio music for the *New York Herald-Tribune* in the late forties, he has not written for a periodical of really wide circulation.) Notwithstanding, he is—with the possible exception of Virgil Thomson, who was a regular critic for relatively few years and whose work, though often brilliant in perception and statement, was more erratic than Haggin's—the best we have had. In one of the few perceptive reviews of *Music Observed*—William Youngren's—he was accurately described as "the only music critic since Shaw who yields as much profit and excitement as the best modern literary critics."

Haggin has been as scornful of pompous musicologists as of newspaper hacks, as impatient with academic theory-spinning as with journalistic ignorance and vulgarity. He has ever been the practical critic, has functioned as the most tireless exemplar in his field of what Nathan once defined as the critical ideal: "Criticism should be the art of separating the good from the bad and espousing the cause of the good." I have not always agreed with Haggin as to what is good or bad, but I have for very many years been grateful for his sanity, his incorruptibility, his courage, for the "moral quality" that shines in his work as it did—as he has noted—in Toscanini's. His writing will endure, I think, as long as sensitivity of response, honesty of purpose, and grace of statement are cherished in criticism.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reviews

MARIUS BEWLEY

Poetry Chronicle[1]

SIR HERBERT READ'S ACTIVE CAREER AS A POET began in the middle years of the first World War and has continued down to the present. Only Pound's creative lifetime has been longer and more representative in our time: for although Edmund Blunden, who is at present Oxford Professor of Poetry, was publishing his pleasant Georgian poems in 1914, they have remained essentially Georgian and unrepresentative of the line of development taken by poetry in the twentieth century. From the beginning Read's poetry has been recognizably, even insistently, modern, although it has been a modernity little disposed to outrage conservative sensibilities, even in the earlier decades of his career: and it has been a modernity that has changed surprisingly little in style over half a century. One cannot read the 286 pages of Read's *Collected Poems* without a sharp awareness of the writer's informed intelligence, and especially of his simple courageous decency that seems the strongest single quality in his best poems. The persistence of these virtues across fifty years must necessarily command a strong assent from the reader. But unfortunately these virtues we assent to so happily too often seem attached to the poems only by the most tenuous of connections. Disembodied and unincarnate, they lend the shadow but rarely the substance of power to the words on the page.

The unsuccessful and the successful are so curiously combined in this work that the first step in attempting an evaluation is to discover where these poems go wrong before saying where they go right. It is well known that Sir Herbert subscribes to the organic theory of poetry, by which he means essentially what Coleridge meant by it: that the principle of unity among the parts of a poem—its words, meter, images, rhythm, and so on—resembles the vital unity among the parts of a plant rather than the merely *organized* unity among the wheels, cogs, and levers of a machine. At the end of *Collected Poems* he prints a short essay under the title, "What Is a Poem?" in which he writes:

1 COLLECTED POEMS, by *Herbert Read*. Horizon Press. $6.50. AMERICAN SCENES AND OTHER POEMS, by *Charles Tomlinson*. Oxford University Press. $3.50. FOX ON A BARN DOOR, by *Ted Walker*. George Braziller. $3.95. EVENTS & CELEBRATIONS, by *R. G. Vliet*. Viking Press. $5.00. ARIEL, by *Sylvia Plath*. Harper & Row. $4.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> A poem is not a statement, but a manifestation, a manifestation of *being*. It may be that some poems are enhanced by a meaning, but I have never been able to discover what difference the inclusion of a verifiable meaning made to any poem that spontaneously suggests itself to the mind as archetypal, such as one of Shakespeare's songs. Many great poets take occasion, in writing a poem, to be philosophical or social critics or entertainers, and they have great ability in these ambiguous roles; but Ariel's song rises mockingly above their cares and is "no mortal business, nor no sound that the earth owes."

There are certain vaguenesses here that are scarcely worth pausing over. Within the thematic context of *The Tempest* Ariel's song seems to me to have a meticulously exact and verifiable meaning. But leaving these considerations aside, there is a good deal one can agree with in this statement, which is presumably intended as a gloss on Sir Herbert's own creative intentions. So far as I can see, a majority of his poems fall short of the goal postulated here. Sir Herbert has a taste for disembodied speculation in his verse that easily surpasses the more unreadable parts of Shelley. For example, consider this speech from *Moon's Farm* (1955):

> If man had not been able to utter the name of God
> he would never have conceived the idea of God
> And so God was first manifested to man in speech
> and in the poetry inherent in speech
> in the logos.
> That is perhaps fairly obvious
> but the more I have pondered on this fact
> the more I have realized the predicament into which we
> as men
> are shown by this dependence on logos.
> For two things could happen
> and did happen.
> In the beginning there was the cosmos
> (or nature as we more politely call it)
> and in the midst of the cosmos
> and part of it
> was man
> growing aware of his environment.
> He slowly perfected words to express his predicament.
> But then the word became God
> the instrument that had enabled man to express the idea of
> an outer cosmos
> was identified with the idea he expressed.
> Men then worshipped
> not the cosmos of which they were a part

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but the idea of the cosmos which they could
separate from themselves as a word
and make absolute as an idea.

If we read this passage, which is an extreme example of too much of Read's less happy verse, in the light of his prose statement I have quoted, it will be seen at once that his theory and his practice can sometimes be worlds apart. "A poem is not a statement, but a manifestation," he wrote; yet here we have *only* statement, albeit statement so unanchored to any tangible reality that the mind slumbers, is tranced, in this thin abstract air. Rhythmically, despite the elaborate typesetting on the page, the passage is a failure, and hence there can be nothing "organic" about it at all, for rhythm is that element in poetry which subsumes all others: the *process* by which words, meter, images, ideas, are all metabolized into the living substance and unity of the poem. This, if I am not mistaken, is Sir Herbert's own view of the matter, and by this criterion a good deal of his poetry fails.

But if lack of rhythmical identity characterizes many of these poems, others are more firmly moulded and illuminate rather than conceal the experience at their heart. When Read's subject directly engages his humanity, the decency of his insights and feeling replaces the relaxed and banal rhythm of his more "literary" poems with direct, effectively astringent statement. In "Ode: Written during the battle of Dunkirk" he looks back to his own experiences in the first World War:

One of the dazed and disinherited
I crawled out of that mess
with two medals and a gift of blood-money.
No visible wounds to lick—only a resolve
to tell the truth without rhetoric
the truth about war and about men
involved in the indignities of war.

Taking this as a clue of where to look for his best work, we turn back to *Naked Warriors* (1919), which contains most of his war poems and which seems to me unmistakably his best volume. We find there an unusual power to evoke and control strong feeling by the direct delineation of action without contributory comment. "Kneeshaw Goes to War" is an effectively organized and moving poem, and the following passage from it should rank Sir Herbert among the best poets of World War I along with Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg:

There are a few who will find it hard to forget
Polygonveld.
The earth was scarr'd and broken
By torrents of plunging shells;
Then wash'd and sodden with autumnal rains.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And Polygonbeck
(Perhaps a rippling stream
In the days of Kneeshaw's gloom)
Spread itself like a fatal quicksand,—
A sucking, clutching death.
They had to be across the beke
And in their line before dawn.
A man who was marching by Kneeshaw's side
Hesitated in the middle of the mud,
And slowly sank, weighted down by equipment and arms.
He cried for help;
Rifles were stretched to him;
He clutched and they tugged,
But slowly he sank.
His terror grew—
Grew visibly when the viscous ooze
Reached his neck.
And there he seemed to stick,
Sinking no more.
They could not dig him out—
The oozing mud would flow back again.

The dawn was very near.

An officer shot him through the head:
Not a neat job—the revolver
Was too close.

Then the dawn came, silver on the wet brown earth.

There are a good many passages and whole poems as good as this in the early Read. The note of Stoic compassion and human decency continues to be struck occasionally down to the latest poems—and whenever it is the poem is likely to come off, either wholly or in part. "From the Platform," written in 1965, tells of an evening when the poet addressed a meeting called to protest atomic warfare, and again he gives us a poem almost as moving as the ones in *Naked Warriors*. It is in this world of compassionate human values, not the world of "literary" values, that Sir Herbert's stature as a poet rises highest.

In the essay to which reference has already been made, Read names "the poets who were my immediate mentors," and the list includes T. E. Hulme, F. S. Flint, Ezra Pound, H. D., T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams. Although I see little direct influence of Miss Moore on this verse, the others are much in evidence throughout the volume. What these poets share in common, perhaps

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

again with the exception of Marianne Moore, is a strong element of Imagism, at least in part of their work. Despite its superficiality and general invitation to mediocrity, Imagism has been a surprising source of strength in the best of twentieth-century poetry. The *Cantos,* for example, is basically an elaborate extension of its method, and even *The Waste Land,* to say nothing of Eliot's earlier poems, is influenced by Imagist techniques. Read's first volume of verse was predominantly Imagist in inspiration, and it was doubtless the spare economy of Imagism's visual evocations that led into the considerable achievement of his early war poems; and it continues to be an operative influence in his work.

Charles Tomlinson is one of the better poets now writing in England, but his latest book, *American Scenes,* is a disappointment. Although it contains several poems as good as the better (but not the best) poems of his earlier volumes, that section of the book to which his title specifically refers is an attempt to broaden the range of his subject-matter, and in comparison with the poems of his first volume, *Seeing Is Believing* (1950), they seem to me unsuccessful. Tomlinson's first volume was admirably named, for he has striven in his work for an objectivity that opposes the visual process of registering the material world with accuracy and precision to the Wordsworthian "inward eye" that half sees and half creates. The quality of truth for him has always resided in what is seen, not in the seer. In this respect many of his poems bring to mind Keats's remarks to Woodhouse: "A poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other body. . . ." As Keats makes clear, this attitude is the opposite from Wordsworth's "egotistical sublime," where

> The mind is lord and master—outward sense
> The obedient servant of her will.

A comparison of a famous passage from *The Prelude* with one of the best poems from Tomlinson's latest volume will perhaps help to define his creative intentions. In Book XII Wordsworth recalls how as a child he had become separated during a journey to the hills from his companion and guide. Suddenly finding himself alone in a bottom where a murderer had been hung in chains many years before, the terrified child

> fled,
> Faltering and faint, and ignorant of the road:
> Then reascending the bare common, saw
> A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
> The beacon on the summit, and, more near,
> A girl who bore a pitcher on her head,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And seemed with difficult steps to trace her way
Against the blowing wind. It was, in truth,
An ordinary sight; but I should need
Colours and words that are unknown to man,
To paint the visionary dreariness
Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
Invested moorland waste and naked pool,
The beacon crowning the low eminence,
The female and her garments vexed and tossed
By the strong wind.

In this superbly rendered scene, the girl forcing her difficult way against the wind is not so much a material object of intrinsic interest as a focus and reflector for the "visionary dreariness" that flows out from the poet's mind. *That* is the subject. But in "The Hill" Tomlinson invests another girl in a somewhat similar situation with an entirely different kind of poetic function, and in doing so he gives us a very different kind of poetry:

Do not call to her there,
but let her go
bearing our question
in her climb: what does she
confer on the hill, the hill on her?

It shrinks
the personal act and yet
it magnifies
by its barrenly fertile sweep
her very fact.

She
alone, unnamed (as it were),
in making her thought's theme
that thrust and rise,
is bestowing a name:

She inclines
against the current of its resistance,
(as simple as walking, this)
and her bridge-leaner's stance
subdues it with (almost) a willessness.

Nature is hard. Neither the mind
nor the touch can penetrate
to a defenceless part;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but, held on the giant palm, one may negotiate
and she, rising athwart it, is showing the art.

So, do not call to her there:
let her go on,
whom the early sun
is climbing up with to the hill's crown—
she, who did not make it, yet can make
the sun go down by coming down.

In this poem the climbing girl and the steep hill are objects which, simply by existing, by *being* what they are, and by being seen as they *are,* generate their own importance. The poet will not even violate the separateness of her existence by calling to her. Insofar as it is possible in writing a poem, Tomlinson struggles to contribute nothing at all to the situation beyond accuracy of observation and precision of statement—in short, craftsmanship. What he seeks is beauty of inherent quality and relation. The relation between the "negotiating" girl and the terrain she climbs is expressed in terms of posture and stance, and this "relation" becomes in the poem the basis of an art that is predominantly or wholly physical and objective as opposed to the subjective or visionary art of Romanticism. Compare the relation between man and nature described by Tomlinson in the fifth stanza above with these familiar lines from the preface to *The Excursion:*

How exquisitely the individual Mind
. . . to the external World
Is fitted: and how exquisitely, too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind,
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish. . .

Accepting William Carlos Williams' statement, "No ideas but in things," as the most trustworthy directive for modern poetry, certain recent criticism has professed to see poetry abandoning old strategies for the sake of incorporating reality in poetry in a new way. While this criticism has tended to exaggerate the possibilities both of incarnating the material in verbal form, and the ultimate importance for poetry of doing so, there is no doubt that the best poetry of recent years has shown a tendency to withdraw from extreme subjectivisim towards an encounter with existential reality. Such criticism might find in certain poems by Tomlinson—for example, "A Given Grace"—corroborating support of its thesis:

Two cups,
a given grace,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

afloat and white
on the mahogany pool
of table. They unclench
the mind, filling it
with themselves.
Though common ware,
these rare reflections,
coolness of brown
so strengthens and refines
the burning of their white,
you could not wish
them other than they are—
you, who are challenged
and replenished by
those empty vessels.

This attempt to carry over into words the solid reality of the material object is in the tradition of such poems as Williams' "By the road to the contagious hospital" or Stevens' "Study of Two Pears." Such work obviously marks a transition towards more objective vision, but it hardly constitutes the metaphysical revolution in poetry some critics have suggested. Accomplished and pleasing as some of this poetry is, it is easy to grow bored with it rather soon, and it is difficult to think that a future century will find it much more absorbing than we find eighteenth-century topographical poetry. And even for us its greatest interest is perhaps in the artful way it often seems (as in "A Given Grace") to transpose the skills and tricks of the painter into the techniques of the poet. It is obviously easier to handle the inanimate than the human in this mode of poetry, and Tomlinson's attempt to extend it to human types and situations in the present volume appears to me less a new advance than a partial regression in the direction of somebody like Edgar Lee Masters:

No books, no songs
belong in the eighty-
year old memory:
he knows where
the Indian graves are
in the woods, recalls
the day the Apaches
crept into Valdez
carrying away
a boy who
forty years later
came back
lacking one arm and said:
"I could hear you all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

searching, but I
dursn't cry out
for fear they'd. . ."
The Indians had trained their prize
to be a one-armed thief.
"And we never did," the old man says,
"See a thief like him
in Valdez."

I do not know what part of the English coastline provides the background for many of the poems in Ted Walker's *Fox on a Barn Door,* but I kept thinking as I read them of the East Anglian mudflats around Aldeburgh where George Crabbe spent his boyhood, and which he described so vividly in *Peter Grimes:*

When tides were neap, and, in the sultry day
Through the tall bounding mud-banks made their way,
Which on each side rose swelling, and below
The dark warm flood ran silently and slow;
There anchoring, Peter chose from man to hide,
There hang his head and view the lazy tide

In its hot slimy channel slowly glide;
Where the small eels that left the deeper way
For the warm shore within the shadows play;
Where gaping muscles left upon the mud,
Slope their slow passage to the fallen flood;—
Here dull and hopeless he'd lie down and trace
How sidelong crabs had scrawl'd their crooked race.

The dreariness of such a landscape with its suggestion of eternal recurrence in the tides and of primordial decay in the rotting smells of the shoreline provided Crabbe with the perfect setting to sharpen the definition of the horrible guilt of Peter Grimes, the child murderer. A similar landscape between sea and shore, laced with rank and fetid smells, and astir with crawling, wriggling life, becomes a principal means of surfacing disturbed but ill-defined feelings and fears in Mr. Walker's own sensibility. This is from a poem called "Lancing Beach":

An asphaltic sea had lain
with a rash of bladder-wrack
breaking out along its back.

It was a sea-leukaemia
and the sea convulsed with it,
throwing up silver brit

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the body of a man.
Here it was they found him, here,
with little eels in his hair,

and from his unstoppered husk
fluid flowed. Balls of black flies
rolled in the pits of his eyes.

I flung a great pearl of grief
with all my strength at the sea's
apathy. . . .

The grief I cast is for me.
There is a smell of sickness—
I must come to terms with this.

A good many of the twenty-eight poems in this first small collection are concerned with coming to some kind of terms with this "smell of sickness." Whatever its exact nature is, this haunting sense of unease whenever it makes its appearance in the poems comes up in images from the depths. We not only have the ominous corpse of the man cast up from the sea, but in "Conger" we have a vivid symbol of evil in the conger eel with teeth "like the Iron Maid of Nuremberg," dying in the bottom of the fishing boat after being dragged from its "manor" on the sea floor. And again in "The Skate Fishers" we have a poem of sinister but restrained psychological suggestion. At dead of night the skate fishers lower their long lines into the ocean, hoping to bring the giant skate or devilfish to the surface, but

at that

taut instant the great skate dives
through his black rock canyon
deep, deep, beating his wide wings
on its walls; on, on through caves
of no man's knowing. Upon
some arcane ledge, huge, he hangs

pulsing with irritation.
And with each heave of him pumps
the rod above and sideways,
fretting the tightened line on
a jutting shelf till it snaps.
The men, like petrels, restless,

move on across the surface,
veined and broken, through the stars'

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shattered images to shore;
and the skate, with a grimace
of torn lip, spits blood, and goes
to do a killing elsewhere.

Perhaps "Easter Poem," from which the book finds its title, is the best piece in the volume. Walking alone into the hills on an Easter morning, the poet comes to a barn on the door of which a dead fox has been nailed:

In the frail
first light I saw him, unreal
and sudden through the lifting mist,
a fox on a barn door, nailed
like a coloured plaster Christ
in a Spanish shrine, his tail

coiled around his loins. Sideways
his head hung limply, his ears
snagged with burdock, his dry nose
plugged with black blood. For two days
he's held the orthodox pose.
The endemic English noise

of Easter morning
was mixed in the mist swirling
and might have moved his stiff head.
Under the hill the ringing
had begun: and the sun rose red
on the stains of his bleeding.

This picture of the crucified fox is drawn out of a deeply experienced emotional reaction, yet oddly enough the exact significance of that emotion remains inscrutable. Walker has his own brand of Negative Capability, and is content to register a strong, complex feeling in this poem without attempting to break it down analytically. In comparison with a facile variation on the Crucifixion theme like Houseman's "The Carpenter's Son," "Easter Morning" seems to me a subtle and moving success. It is, in fact, Walker's most successful poem. This volume has received a good deal of critical recognition in England, and some of the poems are in fact quite impressive. Yet they are poems that hint at more than they actually achieve. The intimations that lurk in their depths are sombre, perhaps even ominous, but like Mr. Walker's giant skate, they break their lines and swim away too easily. It is possible that for what he has to say he needs a larger frame than these short poems can provide.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

R. G. Vliet's first collection, *Events & Celebrations,* is built around a sequence of twenty poems entitled "Clem Maverick," which originally appeared in *The Texas Quarterly.* This may be worth mentioning because the sequence as a whole has an accomplished blare and gaudiness for which *Texan* may be the best adjective. Clem Maverick as invented by Mr. Vliet is a sensationally successful singer of country music who finds fame, fortune, and early alcoholic death on the rustic music circuit of the Southwest while under contract to TopNotch Music. As his manager said of him after his death:

> . . . this was a boy
> with dark in his fingers from the word Go.
> That's how he played. Or maybe it was
> he had something to give and instead
> they took it.

The sequence starts with rhythms reminiscent of Vachel Lindsay:

> Today in the capital it's Clem Maverick Day,
> the governor a-saddle, the queen in her trellis,
> the thousand-gallon stetsons of paper maché,
>
> the rose-wove floats of Texas-size guitars,
> the cowgirl duchesses in bannered cars.
> The whole damn crowd just a-stomps and roars,
> and tonight there'll be a host of recording stars.

From this point the sequence winds through a medley of folk rhythms and colloquial memories of Clem's relatives, friends, and mistresses, to a concluding "message" from the staff at TopNotch Music on hearing of Clem's death, which is somewhat in the manner of the song "We'll Meet Again" that brought *Dr. Strangelove* to an end while a mushroom cloud filled the screen. A certain obviousness in the whole effort is palliated by the pleasure and broad satiric effect with which Vliet brings the performance off.

If one has moments of doubt about the consciousness of the irony sustaining "Clem Maverick," they should be dispelled by a prose piece (unfortunately Vliet calls it a prose poem), "The Ants." "The Ants" tells of how a powerful and glorious ant city loses its liberties by succumbing to military and police power at home. To me it seems more subtle and amusing, if less ambitious and timely, than Orwell's *Animal Farm.* The ant-narrator speaks in those portentous "historic" tones we have become accustomed to in poems like MacLeish's *Conquistador* or Perse's *Anabase.* Here is a passage from the latter poem, in Eliot's translation, describing the founding of the City:

> Thus was the City founded and placed in the morning under the labials of a holy name. The encampments are razed from the hills!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> And we who are in the wooden galleries,
> head bare and foot bare in the freshness of the world,
> what have we to laugh at. . .?

And here is Mr. Vliet's ant-narrator:

> Thus was our City built. And I have traveled, even through the vetch and farthest edges of the grass, and there is no other like it. Perfect it was, in its every structure: the singular and just accomplishment of our labor. Forum and basilica! the Halls of Incubation and cool crypts of storage, treasuries and stockyards, nurseries, granaries, concourses, hothouses and cellars. And central to it all, that *Queenschamber,* high vaulted dark place, beamed of an ancient bone.

The tone, so beautifully established here, is sustained through eighteen pages. As the ant unfolds his solemn narrative we are given a richly applicable parable about historic process—a story of police states, espionage, and of political and military futility, all focused in a ludicrously delightful perspective.

The reception that has been accorded Sylvia Plath's last volume of verse has been generous to a fault. The poems are marked by a good deal of freshness and originality, but collectively they do not seem to me to add up to that self-consuming brilliance that some critics, including Mr. Robert Lowell in his introduction, have professed to find in them. "These poems are playing Russian roulette with six cartridges," Mr. Lowell writes; and he finds that "her art's immortality is life's disintegration." But this was written after the event of her own tragic death. The idea that creative genius is a destroying fire has never seemed to be borne out by the facts, and I am not sure that Mr. Lowell really means much more by his remarks than Edna St. Vincent Millay meant in her little quatrain beginning "I burn my candle at both ends"—assuming of course that Miss Millay was talking about the creative process and not something else entirely.

The life of these poems is centered in their imagery, but having read the volume several times over a period of two or three weeks, I find it difficult to discover under or behind the images a decisively shaping attitude towards experience. I do not mean that consistent attitudes are not present throughout the volume, but Miss Plath sometimes seems to have *hardened* into them; they do not seem to have evolved out of her sensibility to become the living form of what she writes. There is occasionally a kind of female hardness that I find resistible:

> The eye of the blind pianist
>
> At my table on the ship.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He felt for his food.
His fingers had the noses of weasels.
I couldn't stop looking.

And again I am uncertain whether it may not be a kind of hardness rather than strength that makes paralytics in iron lungs, sickness, fever, and dying such favoured subjects with her. These lines from "Cut" are, within their range, witty and accomplished enough, but I find in them a vague unpleasantness of a kind I distrust:

What a thrill—
My thumb instead of an onion.
The top quite gone
Except for a sort of hinge

Of skin,
A flap like a hat,
Dead white.
Then that red plush.

Little pilgrim,
The Indian's axed your scalp.
Your turkey wattle
Carpet rolls

Straight from the heart.

More positively, the poems celebrate energy. The title poem, "Ariel," is about her horse and the joy of riding:

And I
Am the arrow,

The dew that flies
Suicidal, at one with the drive
Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning.

But sometimes the celebration can be couched in surprisingly ordinary language and images:

What I love is
The piston in motion—
My soul dies before it.
And the hooves of the horses,
Their merciless churn.

These attitudes, then, are what we find near the centre of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poems. One could perhaps ask for more. Nevertheless, many of these poems do live locally in their images and lines. "Morning Song" is one of the better poems in the volume, and to quote it entire will give a fairer indication of the true nature of Sylvia Plath's achievement than further discussion. The poem presents her sensibility at its most amiable and happiest. Without effort or strain the poem succeeds in being perfectly unhackneyed and perfectly natural:

> Love set you going like a fat gold watch.
> The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry
> Took its place among the elements.
>
> Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue.
> In a drafty museum, your nakedness
> Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls.
>
> I'm no more your mother
> Than the cloud that distils a mirror to reflect its own slow
> Effacement at the wind's hand.
>
> All night your moth-breath
> Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen:
> A far sea moves in my ear.
>
> One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral
> In my Victorian nightgown.
> Your mouth opens clean as a cat's. The window square
>
> Whitens and swallows its dull stars. And now you try
> Your handful of notes;
> The clear vowels rise like balloons.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VICTOR BROMBERT

Perse's Avian Order

SAINT-JOHN PERSE'S UNEXPECTED COLLABORATION WITH BRAQUE began as a poetic meditation on birds and turned into a poem about space and the rapture of the poet.[1] Exile, migrant and navigator of the air, Perse's bird, like the rhapsodist, brings the seasons together. His allegiance to life and to nature is that of the ascetic. Launched on his wings, doubly loyal to air and land, he liberates himself from the "tragic shores of the real," only to reaffirm, through the austerity of flight, a sense of peace and unity achieved at the very frontiers of man. He is a "prince of ubiquity," a creator of his own flight.

The *topos* of the bird is one of the richest and most elusive in Western literature. Soarer of apocalypse or of lyric ecstasy, warbler of songs or predatory circler of the upper spheres, the avian creature has been, in turn, symbol of freedom, pride, creative fancy and Icarian ambition. To the imprisoned spirit it meant freedom and movement. To the spiritually oppressed it represented elation and escape. The Romantics, in particular, were supremely fond of it. The "shrill delight" of Shelley's skylark, the "high requiem" of Keats's nightingale are echoed by many other poetic trills. Some erudite aviculturist—or better still, some literary historian with a passion for bird images—might some day establish a catalogue of literary birds. From Dante's woeful cranes "cantando lor lai" to Mallarmé's tragically mute swan caught in the lake of ice, European poetry and fiction offer a broad display: La Fontaine's amorous pigeons, Milton's praisers of heaven, Coleridge's tragic albatross, Stendhal's proud hawk, Dostoevsky's freedom-loving eagle, Verlaine's singer of laments. The variations are endless; but almost in every case there is an implicit dialectic tension between intimacy and space, between the inner life and infinity, between claustration and spiritual freedom.

Partly a votive poem, partly an *oeuvre de circonstance* (an almost unique occurrence in Perse's production), *Birds* curiously combines impressionistic-essayistic meditations with authentic lyricism. By coincidence, Braque and Saint-John Perse, who came to like and respect each other, were both at work on the bird motif. For his projected series of plates, *L'Ordre des oiseaux,* Braque had chosen an epigraph from Perse's *Amers (Seamarks).* When they agreed to collaborate on a de-luxe album, the poet's own text developed, partly at least, into a meditation on Braque's avian order.

Braque's most remarkable birds are to be found in his late works. He had, of course, always been haunted by the problem of space,

[1] BIRDS, by *St.-John Perse.* Translated by *Robert Fitzgerald.* With reproductions of four original color etchings by *Georges Braque.* Bollingen Series LXXXII. Pantheon Books. $10.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which preoccupied him not merely as a technical question, but as a matter of ultimate meaning. His reactions against the notion and practice of a "directed perspective" must be understood in this light. But it is in his treatment of the bird motif that he perhaps most successfully and most succinctly achieved his poetry of space: in the various "Ateliers" (1948-1955), in particular the one of the Maeght gallery in Paris with its stylized bird in flight and enormous light arrow pointing in the opposite direction; in the great white-rimmed black birds on the ceiling of the salle Henri II in the Louvre; and perhaps most dramatically in the extraordinarily simple *"A tire d'aile"* (1955) evoking an aerodynamic encounter with the black spot of night.

What precisely is the relation between Braque's birds and those of Perse? There are unquestionably passages in the poem which allude directly to the painter's plates. There is also a sincere effort, on the part of Perse, to find verbal equivalents for Braque's pictorial forms. But these efforts account neither for the genesis of the poem, nor for its most successful passages. In fact, the themes of space, movement, migration have been permanent themes in Perse's work, ever since *Anabase,* and even earlier in his Antillean poems. The very word *anabasis* suggests, in the original Greek, expedition, travel and adventure, as well as ascension. This exploration is that of the spirit, but it is conceived first of all in topophilic terms: ". . . o seekers, o finders of reasons to move elsewhere. . . ." Roger Caillois, in *Poétique de St.-John Perse,* describes the poet's creation as a "universe of extreme exile." Years later, in his Nobel prize acceptance speech, Perse himself seemed to confirm the notion of a spiritual quest translated into spatial terms. The "great adventure of the poetic spirit" was in his mind related to the "expansion in the moral infinite" of man. It is only appropriate that the Nobel Prize citation should have stressed the "soaring flight" of Perse's poetry. The very titles of his works *(Winds, Rains, Exile, Snows, Seamarks)* suggest the drama of elemental forces played out in space, as well as the proud isolation of man communing with these forces, and, through them, with other men.

The relationship between love and space has perhaps never been more beautifully sung than in Perse's long sea-poem, *Amers* (*Seamarks*). Jacques Guicharnaud (*Yale French Studies,* XXI) speaks of a permanent Grand Opera of the World, and very rightly points out that Perse's poem, an anti-*Wasteland,* achieves a lyricism and even a mystic quality that have their roots in man alone. There is indeed, in Perse's work, a noticeable freedom from Christian beliefs and from the themes of sin. But more significant than this aloofness from Christian anguish or Christian commitment is the positive mystic bond which Perse repeatedly establishes between the private and the universal. He himself, in a commentary on *Amers,* clearly stated his desire to bring into focus the integrity of man as well as his taste for the divine. He chose the sea because this "reservoir of the eternal forces" symbolically represents the fulfillment and the surpassing of himself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by man. A choric ode within a dramatic framework, *Amers* proclaims a magnificent solidarity with life. But it does so at the level of individual destiny and individual joy. This explains the central importance of the erotic love scene, the longest and most beautiful passage in the whole poem, and possibly the most beautiful section in all of Perse's work. The woman's body, compared to the form of a ship (*"nacelle et nave, et nef votive"*), together with the sea-inspired body of the lover, are both surrounded by the larger sea. Their love-dialogue and love-action in the intimacy of the narrow bed are situated within the larger cosmic dialogue which they re-enact. It is thus neither the universe without man, nor man alone outside and against the world, that Perse's poem is about. It is not about the sea itself, but about "its reign in the heart of man."

How does *Birds* measure up to *Seamarks*? The characteristics and the qualities of Perse's poetry have been exceedingly well discussed by Roger Caillois, and more recently by Arthur Knodel[2] in what is the most comprehensive and sympathetic general study available in English. A poet's poet, admired and translated by T. S. Eliot, Bernard Groethuysen and Ungaretti, Perse is endowed with a voice at once intensely personal, representative of modern trends, and utterly independent vis-à-vis current fashions and practices. Exploiter of etymologies, grand master of the ellipsis and the homologue, conjurer of immense and mobile images to which his prosody is the servant, Perse shuns ambiguities, ironies and the precious games of the esthete. The enormous extension and specialization of his vocabulary are often baffling; the ceremonial tone of his free verse is at times awesome. But there is no hermetic impulse here. Syntax itself plays a humble part. What matters is the substantive: the palpable reality of the world.

Compared with his highest achievements (*Anabase, Poème à l'Etrangère, Amers*), Perse's bird-poem seems to come a little short of greatness. Wavering between the poetic essay and the lyrical meditation, it occasionally even lapses into the didactic. The end of section four sounds particularly flat:

> Removed from his migratory life, cast down on the stone of the painter, the bird has begun to live the cycle of his mutations. He lives in metamorphosis, a serial and dialectical becoming. It is a succession of trials and states always proceeding toward full confession, and from it arises at last in the light the nakedness of an evident thing and the mystery of an identity: unity recovered under what seemed diverse.

Nor is this the translator's fault; if anything, the French original of this passage is slightly worse. Saint-John Perse has never completely eschewed grandiloquence; here he at times falls into verbosity and almost academic pompousness.

[2] *Saint-John Perse* (Edinburgh University Press, 1966).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At times—for there are redeeming elements. The thematic texture is opulent; the boldness of the images and their intricate resonances remain as admirable as in some of the exemplary works. Love of the life-principle and of individual vitality are streamlined by graceful flight and by an almost spiritual luminosity. ". . . a white gull opened on the sky, like a woman's hand before the flame of a lamp, elevating in daylight the pink translucence of a host, a wafer's whiteness . . ." (" . . . *la rose transparence d'une blancheur d'hostie* . . . "). This kind of poetry is better than successful. In *Birds,* Saint-John Perse seems to be at his best when combining images of movement with spiritual and creative volitation. Poetry itself, and the artist's achievement, are seen as adventures in space. Words—the poet's instruments of communion —are carried "on the rhythm of the universe"; they are part of the larger, wandering strophe of the unsaid. One is reminded here of the transcendental reality ("surréalité") and the far-reaching light of the "mediating image" to which the poet alluded in his Nobel Prize speech.

Nautical similes and metaphors have their place in most of Perse's poetry; they are exploited with singular appropriateness in *Birds.* The chest cage of the animal is compared to a hull; the ribs are joined along the keel; the breastbone appears in the shape of a stem or prow; the shoulderbone is an oarlock, and the pelvic enclosure is where the stern is set. This nautical anatomy reminds us that Perse is a master of technical terms. But he is also a master of grandiose and even somber images, as for instance in the nocturnal passage of section nine: "We have seen him . . . passing, black . . . across the mirror of an autumn night, with the wild geese of the old Sung poets, and he left us mute amid the bronze of gongs."

Translating Saint-John Perse is perhaps not as difficult as translating Valéry or Mallarmé. At least, not as much seems lost in the translation. This is not to say that this translation does not have its uneven moments. "Against the fire of day" is not up to *"à contre-feu du jour." "S'engager"* is not quite rendered by "entering with passion." *"L'inattachement de la couleur"* is more nuanced and more abstract than "the inconstancy of colour." And of course the underlying rhythmic patterns were difficult to render. Yet Robert Fitzgerald's translation is remarkably faithful and fluent. And it results in some superb poetic effects in which the loss of the original is almost not regretted. I must confess that I prefer "a single summering is heresy" to *"son hérésie est celle d'une seule estivation."* "Double fealty," at the beginning of section two, was a particularly intelligent way of translating *"double allégeance"*—since the English word "allegiance," of too common a usage, has lost its old flavor. In general, the translation is done with much taste, as is the exceedingly elegant volume which contains reproductions of four original color etchings of stylized birds by Braque—three of which are very attractive indeed. The fourth one, mauve and purple, seems to me somewhat muddled.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PATRICK CRUTTWELL

New Miltonics

ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE PERFORMANCES of the greatest of English critics—who is Samuel Johnson—is his examination, in the *Life* of Milton, of *Paradise Lost*. There is no better example of how to turn, with dignity and totality, an intellectual somersault. For Johnson begins with impressive praise—"a poem," he calls it, "which, considered with respect to design, may claim the first place, and with respect to performance, the second place, among the productions of the human mind"—and he goes on in this style for several pages. He slides with apologetic reluctance into considering the poem's weaknesses—"for faults and defects every work of man must have"—but once he is launched on them, the conclusion is crushing. "But original deficience cannot be supplied. The want of human interest is always felt. *Paradise Lost* is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again. None ever wished it longer than it is. Its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure"—and such a verdict, from a critic who always accepted as final criterion the spontaneous pleasure of unbiassed readers and who wrote elsewhere that "that book is good in vain which the reader throws away," is in fact a radical condemnation.

You need not agree with Johnson; but here, as so often, he is saying what many feel more frankly than many like to say it. Which truth has of late been borne in upon me by the experience of teaching *Paradise Lost* to a class of freshmen, in one of those splendid courses which take one on an impressive sweep from Homer to Camus, with Tolstoy and Cervantes in between. It would be vain to deny that poor Milton was a flop. There was a resistance to him stronger than to any of the others. Not much probing and querying were needed to bring out the source of this resistance. It lay in Milton's language—in that strange, wonderful "epic dialect" which he invented for this one poem and which belongs to this poem alone. Neither the bigness and centrality of the story, nor the undeniable fascination of Milton's own personality, could get across the language barrier—across such lines as these:

> The aggregated Soil
> Death with his Mace petrific, cold and dry,
> As with a Trident smote, and fix't as firm
> As *Delos* floating once; the rest his look
> Bound with *Gorgonian* rigor not to move,
> And with *Asphaltic* slime . . .

Of which my freshmen would be apt to ask: "How come he didn't say

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it in English, sir?" And indeed it is not too easy to answer that, except by arguments which merely increase the inquirers' suspicions—"Well, you see, it's all based on Latin; the roundabout sentence (object-subject-verb) gives an effect of hard, stiff finality, and then there are sort of puns with the Latin words behind the English, like *petrific* ('stone-making') makes a pun with *pontific* (you know, *pontifex maximus,* the Roman bridge-maker), and remember that *rigor* in Latin means stiffness, as in *rigor mortis,* but also there's a hint of the English 'rigorousness' "—but it does *not* get across; you may be explaining, but you are certainly not convincing; and you suddenly realise the plain fact that only a very considerable, and more than monolingual, literary sophistication is needed not merely to overcome, but positively to appreciate, the Miltonic language. You begin to wonder if that legendary Oxonian snob may not have been right when he said that the ability to appreciate *Paradise Lost* was the consummation and final reward of a classical education.

Not that I would remove it from "Freshman English." In an age and society whose education seems increasingly devoted to making people imagine they have understood and appreciated what in fact they have not, it is probably a good thing to present them now and then with something beyond them, something they must fight with and chew at. And the poem itself is still there, alive and moving as ever. But it is there as what its author always knew it would be: as caviare to the general. "Fit audience find, though few" is what he himself expected for it, and he was essentially right. To the average reader of today it is far more inaccessible than Shakespeare or Chaucer; its huge fame and wide public in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries must have been largely due to its solemn and Biblical subject (if Milton had carried out his original intention, and chosen instead an Arthurian subject for his epic, can one imagine its appeal would have been anything like as great?)—and also, I suppose, it was helped by its association with an author celebrated for his purity, Puritanism, vast erudition in the classical languages, and high-toned religious and political sentiments. But nowadays, when Puritanism is a much dirtier word than any four-lettered one, and nobody reads the Bible, and nobody knows Latin and Greek (I am aware that my exaggerations are showing), *Paradise Lost* must be read and appreciated by a select few, for what I believe it has always been in reality: an exceedingly difficult, eccentric, and personal poem.

But still the effort is made, to recruit for it an audience wider than the "fit though few" which its author looked for. And why not? One in a hundred may get the message, and that will be justification enough. Each of the two books I am now considering[1] was based on a series of lectures delivered to an academic audience. Frye's *The Return of*

[1] THE RETURN OF EDEN, by *Northrop Frye*. University of Toronto Press. $4.95. A READING OF PARADISE LOST, by *Helen Gardner*. Oxford University Press. $3.40.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Eden was intended "as an introduction to *Paradise Lost* for relatively inexperienced students," and Miss Gardner's *A Reading of Paradise Lost* grew from her experience "in teaching and lecturing on the poem to first year undergraduates" and from her discovery of the difficulties in the way. Both books, indeed, display a strong awareness of such difficulties. They may be grouped under four heads; theological, cosmological, structural and psychological (the last-named both in the character of the poem and in the personality of Milton).

The theological difficulties, as always, centre round Milton's God. Nobody, it seems, can manage to defend *him*. Frye likens him to a "smirking hypocrite," finds his arguments "profoundly unconvincing," and observes that "whenever he opens his ambrosial mouth the sensitive reader shudders." Miss Gardner is not quite so violent, but even she is constrained to remark on the "fundamental absurdity in making a God a theologian" and to acknowledge the "revulsion" that many readers feel at him. Neither is prepared to take the Empsonian road and argue that in fact Milton meant it—that he himself detested this God: but in that case how can one deny that one is affirming the poem to be a failure in its official objective? How can it be "justifying the ways of God to man" if it is making its readers look on him as a repulsive hypocrite—not to mention a hideous bore? Milton himself, I am very sure, would have repudiated with scorn defenders such as these; "if that is what you think of my God," he would have said to them, "you are unworthy of my poem." It would not have occurred to him—he was not a modest man—to blame it on his poem's failure to do what it said it would do; but this is what has happened. Here, as in his prose, Milton is a hopeless propagandist: too much an individualist, too eccentric, ever to convince others by argument. You can sympathize with him and be moved by him, but you cannot, against your will, be made to agree with him.

The cosmological difficulties are not much noted in these books. Frye is aware of them. "Everybody," he says, "who has ever had to comment on *Paradise Lost* has had to devote some time to its cosmology, often with some reluctance at having to incorporate what seems the lumber of defunct science in with the living poetry." My own experience has been that such "reluctance" is entirely justified, for the universe of Milton's poem is not constructed with the accuracy of Dante's nor does its geography really matter to the total effect. Milton describes by suggestiveness, not literalness; his mind was essentially anti-scientific (Frye points out the "curiously deprecatory" tone of his references to Galileo), and although—because he is writing a "story"—he must pretend that heaven and hell and Eden are real "places" in some spatial relationship with each other, he is not interested in the details of that relationship. They are not places for him, but conditions. Much the same (I would have thought) can be said of the structural problems of the poem. "Structural analysis" is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

much esteemed in contemporary criticism; a great deal of it, I have to admit, seems to me to demonstrate the ingenuity of the critic rather than the nature of the work criticized. Frye invents a clock, "with the presence of God where the figure 12 is" and the "nadir of the action . . . the fall of Adam and Eve" at 6. Miss Gardner (much more usefully, as I feel) points to the relics of the dramatic form in which Milton originally cast his material, and notes that the poem preserves "the tragic poet's concentration on the single event, the crisis of the action." I would have said that Milton was not profoundly interested in structure. He took the techniques of the Homeric-Virgilian epic—beginning in the middle, flashback narrations and future anticipations, etc.—and used them dutifully but without passion; for they had been made by storytellers for storytelling, and Milton was not a storyteller. What he was really doing was conveying a vision, and the nature of a vision is that it "happens" all at once, not in successive events as a story does. The "story" of *Paradise Lost* is in fact a nuisance to Milton, and so, therefore, is the structure which supports it.

The psychological difficulties are many and complex. They pivot round two poles, the character of Satan and its relationship to Milton's own "rebelliousness," and the characterization of Adam and Eve and the Fall. On the former, Frye is original but not, I feel, convincing; he suggests that "Satan is a rebel, and into Satan Milton has put all the horror and distress with which he contemplated the egocentric revolutionaries of his time"—well, it is certainly true that Milton became thoroughly disillusioned with his fellow-revolutionaries, but he did *not* become disillusioned with revolution. He was as firmly opposed to kingly authority after the Commonwealth had failed as he had been before it began, and Frye's suggestion does not remove the essential difficulty, that a poet whose deepest instincts were those of a rebel should write a poem presenting rebellion as all-wicked and authority as all-good. Indeed, Frye himself, on a later page, admits the difficulty—"what has happened to the political revolutionary in *Paradise Lost*?" It is curious to note how we are still chewing over, still trying to get round, Blake's perception that Milton "was of the Devil's party without knowing it"; for Miss Gardner also has trouble with Satan. She acknowledges that, as Blake had said, Milton's imagination was "unfettered" when it dealt with Satan and hell; she recognizes that Milton presents Satan "grandly" and allows us "to admire his virtues," but hopes to save the day by observing that all this is possible only because we know he is "doomed." Well, perhaps: but again one wonders, as with Milton's God, what he himself would have thought of such roundabout defenders. This is a phenomenon I am always noticing about *Paradise Lost:* its admirers seem always to be defending the poem *against itself.* (I do it myself, no doubt.) I can't think of any other work of which this seems so consistently true.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As for Adam and Eve and the Fall, Frye is oddly self-betraying on this—or is it Milton-betraying? Anyway, he acknowledges that too many readers have found Adam and Eve unintentionally comic. This, he argues, is wrong: "the prevailing assumption has been that all this represents unconscious humour on the part of a humourless poet, and this assumption is quite wrong." But he himself is facetious about them: "Adam and Eve are suburbanites in the nude," he remarks, and he describes the dialogue between the two before Eve goes off on her fatal solitary gardening in terms entirely comic—which are most surely *not* the terms on which Milton wished it to be taken. That dialogue is meant to be loaded to the brim with tragic significance: if most readers find it impossible not to read it as quasi-comic, then, once again, something is wrong, either with most readers or with the poem. Miss Gardner, I feel again, is nearer to the truth here. She perceives that Adam and Eve are presented with intense, quivering solemnity, and that what Milton is above all else concerned to say about them is that humanity in its natural, unfallen state was not, as the libertine thinkers and Epicurean poets had said, promiscuous like the beasts, but was already united in Christian marriage. When Eve has fallen, and Adam still has the chance not to follow her, Miss Gardner honestly recognizes Milton's grim, unflinching conviction that Adam was *wrong* to eat the apple in order to stay with Eve and thereby to "fall away from his Creator for the highest human good, and spurn the Giver for the most precious of all his temporal gifts." Yes, but—once again!—this integrity of Milton's does put a fearful strain on the poem; it does make it enormously difficult for the reader's natural sympathies not to go *against* the poem instead of *with* it. For Milton has built up his picture of prelapsarian sexual joy with all the longing of a passionate and unhappily-married man, and now he presents us with a God who says in effect: "*I* am better than that; you should have given up that for *me*." It is hard not to answer: "*You* should have given us better reason to think so."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DENIS DONOGHUE

Sea of Troubles

THE FRONT JACKET OF MR. HOLLAND'S BOOK[1] FEATURES, between the title and his name, an elaborate blob, presumably one of the stimuli in the Rorschach tests, an incitement to loose association. But the photograph at the back shows the author, only one arm visible, in a stance of concentration. It is tempting to think that the other arm is tied behind his back. The Rorschach blob is an insult, because Mr. Holland never commits his random associations to print. The photograph, however, is almost a review of the book; the author, calm, perceptive, witty, but at the same time constrained, as a critic, by the terminology he avows. I have the impression that Mr. Holland has schooled himself to use such words as "oedipal" and "libidinal" without embarrassment, but it remains a niggardly idiom.

The book begins by collecting Freud's scattered observations on art into a coherent theory; reflections on the artist, the artifact, the reader. Basically, it is a Romantic aesthetic, in which the artist is the central term, self-expression the governing motive, play and daydream the leading analogies. Many of its possibilities have been outlined since Freud by Ernst Kris, Lawrence S. Kubie, and other psychoanalysts, especially in relation to Symbolism. This leads to an account of Freud's dealing in Shakespeare, whom he identified, to Mr. Holland's regret, with Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. In this section we hear a good deal of Hamlet's oedipus complex, Lear's "repressed incestuous claims on the daughter's love," Lady Macbeth's "mysophobia." A natural continuation is the review of Conrad van Emde Boas on the *Sonnets,* Ella Freeman Sharpe on *Hamlet,* Bronson Feldman on *The Comedy of Errors,* and so forth. This section ends with a run through the plays, looking at the most interesting psychoanalytic essays in each case; Barbara Hannah's Jungian study of *All's Well,* Weisinger on *Antony and Cleopatra,* several critics on *Coriolanus,* Erik Erikson's account of "identity diffusion" in *Hamlet.* Up to this point Mr. Holland is the patient expositor, the gracious host, cordial to interpretations some of which have only to be heard to be discredited. But in the last section he takes command. There are three directions, he says, in psychoanalytic criticism and two of them he rejects: the first, in which the critic reads the work to relate it to the author's mind; the second, in which the focus is on the mind of a character, Hamlet, Lady Macbeth, Bertram. Mr. Holland's aim is to sponsor a third way. But his method is, to say the least, oblique. In a long chapter he argues that the critic should concern himself not with the psychology of the author, or even the psychology of his characters, but with the psychology of the audience; or rather, with the

[1]PSYCHOANALYSIS AND SHAKESPEARE, by *Norman N. Holland.* McGraw-Hill. $9.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

effect of the play on the audience, that is, upon himself. At first hearing this sounds like a summary of Kenneth Burke's *Counter-Statement,* and we look around for a footnote of acknowledgement. We are to consider the play, Mr. Holland says, "as a configuration, a multiple projection or symbolization or stimulus of unconscious impulses of the audience, interacting through such primary thought processes as identification, condensation, displacement, and the like." This is the "affective approach"; the play is the stimulus to the audience's response, the critic's response. Mr. Holland spends twenty pages elucidating this approach, only to tell us at the end that he did not mean it. What he really means, what he favours, is in the next chapter. "What criticism needs," he says (and means), "is a sense of the continuum and interaction between objective work of art and subjective response." This is teased out in short, concentrated studies of *Julius Caesar, King Lear, Hamlet, Macbeth, Coriolanus,* and *The Merchant of Venice.*

It might be useful to have a look at the piece on the *Merchant* to see "the emotional roots of a play's theme and significance."

Mr. Holland begins with an orthodox reading, C. S. Lewis's view that "the real play is not so much about men as about metals." Shylock's efforts to take "a breed of barren metal" are set off, Lewis said, against Bassanio's marrying the Princess, "offering her all he has." "All the wealth I had," Bassanio says, "ran in my veins." The play contrasts "the cold, lifeless, mineral wealth worshipped by Shylock to the wealth of human relationships he tries to abuse: Jessica and Lorenzo, Bassanio and Portia, Bassanio and Antonio." This is the interpretation offered, Mr. Holland says, by "conventional critics." The psychoanalytic critic sees the play also as "contrasting two worlds." "Both have oral and anal elements, but one, Venice, is harsh, aggressive, masculine, and niggardly; the other, Belmont, is bountiful, merciful, feminized, and libidinal. In other words, the psychoanalytic readings find the unconscious roots (in our minds or Shakespeare's) for these two different feelings about wealth, and about male and female." There is a little more, but this is the gist of it. Now the juxtaposition of Venice and Belmont is important, but its importance is obvious to anyone, Freudian or not: it is the first thing a critic of any persuasion says of the play. Indeed, I seem to recall a charming recital of precisely this juxtaposition in one of Northrop Frye's books, with none of the psychoanalytical hurly-burly offered by Mr. Holland. If a Freudian ghost is going to come from the grave he had better have something more than this to say. I feel quite sure that Mr. Holland's account of Venice and Belmont was just as lucid, just as perceptive, in 1960 before he went to school at the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute.

Indeed, Mr. Holland often writes as if he were brainwashed in Boston. He knows that Freudian criticism has been in disrepute, but he never takes the full stress of the complaint. He is never sufficiently alive to the crudity of the Freudian patterns, the arrogance with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which they are declared. There is a passage in "Anni Mirabiles" in which Blackmur points to "the malicious criticism of knowledge" as an incorrigible feature of modern philosophy and science. This criticism, he says, "is reflected also in the unmoored diabolism that makes so many mansions in the modern sensibility, and makes them uninhabitable sink-holes of terror and dismay, full of the uncleanly and aborted approximations of the unseemly." Blackmur's instance is Freud, "who began his studies with the aetiology of hysteria and proceeded with its deification: as if all the gross responses unconformable with conduct could ordain conduct." Freud's book, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life,* in its very title is a lie, "told that we might mistake the conditions of our struggle for its object; in short, a malicious criticism of knowledge." So psychology "dissolved the personality into bad behavior," and psychiatry "cured the disease by making a monument of it"; new ways of creating trouble, "new ways of undermining personality and conviction and belief and human relation." I do not ask Mr. Holland to share the Blackmurian rage, but I admire his work too much to think of protecting it from alien noise. My own reservations about the psychoanalytic criticism, in any of its three directions, is that it finds only what it insists on finding and is therefore never astonished. Trading in the same instruments, it is never quick with the sense of difference; thus it imposes ready-made orders, when our need is the great disorder, which is itself, as Stevens said, an order.

Let us leave these tendentious matters; Mr. Holland implies that his "third way" amounts to a pretty complete criticism. I doubt it. An honest man, he concedes that "psychology as such deals not with literature, but with minds": an observation of some consequence. He would also concede, I think, that the Freudian aesthetic, precisely because it is concerned with the nature of the artist, cannot deal with those aspects of the work which are generic, conventional, or mythic; in Shakespeare's plays it cannot deal with the element of first moment, the State. On the relation between the play and the audience Freud had very little to contribute, apart from the idiom of identification; the spectator identifies himself with the hero. This does not allow for "aesthetic distance," a revision by Edward Bullough which, as Mr. Holland rightly says, has been "remarkably fruitful." Again, on the pressure of form, psychoanalytic criticism has not been particularly useful. Mr. Holland mentions Ernst Kris, who "gives form a key role in enabling us to take pleasure in representations of the unpleasant." This is excellent, but far more penetrating things have been said on the same theme by uncommitted critics going about their ordinary business. I have in mind men as different as Gombrich, Adrian Stokes, and Focillon. Indeed, Focillon is still the most perceptive critic of the pressure of form, the way in which "between nature and man, form intervenes," the strange correspondence between a certain order of forms and a certain order of minds. Perhaps this is where the psy-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

choanalytic perspective, however radically revised, is least useful; because it does not register the internal persuasion and energy of the work. I am thinking of the way in which a writer like Swift, committing himself to a basic form or analogy, is thereafter carried "to the end of the line"; the energy released is internal. It would be possible to show, for instance, that in the fourth *Drapier's Letter,* the *Letter to the Whole People of Ireland,* Swift was driven beyond his sober contract by the terminal implications of his imagery; the imagery contained in principle a threat which was certainly beyond Swift's official program. In the Holles Street chapter of *Ulysses* one can see Joyce coming upon possibilities purely "internal to the medium" and working them for all they are worth, regardless of expression or communication. And surely the first thing to say about Shakespeare's sonnets is that they are sonnets; as the second thing to say is that there is a "wooing both ways" between the poet and the form. I find Focillon and, in another way, Worringer far more persuasive on these matters than any psychoanalytic critic. Mr. Holland is constantly perceptive, but his perception, it seems to me, is the good old kind, which he then translates into psychoanalytic terms, often to its disadvantage. He writes of *The Tempest:* "Thus, at the end of his life, we find Shakespeare dealing with the impulses of childhood in their latest development, the father's love for a daughter and his resentment of a son-in-law, one recapitulating the child's love for his mother, the other the last version of a child's aggression toward his father or older brother." Does this really help? Surely the conventional critic is more useful here, who shows the relation between *The Tempest* and the Plautine pattern in which the gruff old man, the *senex,* obstacle to the young lovers, is finally either routed or reconciled. This way of putting it has the advantage that the pattern is demonstrably there, in the dramatic tradition, before its variant reading in Shakespeare's play. And, a last complaint, is it not strange that the psychoanalytic critic can write about these plays of Shakespeare without looking closely at the words? As long as the plot can be stretched to fit a psychoanalytic pattern already there and waiting, he is satisfied; but he is not troubled by the pressure of the whole "story of the night," words, forms, conventions, gestures, relationships, silences, which lead the play from its first moment to its last.

Mr. Holland says that he included the curious Chapter 10 partly, he tells the reader, "to get you to go through a dialectic I have been through." Perhaps this is the best way to read the whole book, as one voice in a moving dialectic. I confess that to me the terminology, lucid as far as it goes, remains ugly, aspiring to the condition of propaganda and often locking thought in cells. It seems to me an idiom in which it is difficult to tell the truth; the new, live truth as distinct from the old formula. The great merit of Mr. Holland's book is that, within the limit of his commitment, he treats the uncommitted reader with remarkable forbearance. He would meet us upon the chosen ground honestly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

J. MITCHELL MORSE

Fiction Chronicle[1]

SOME THINGS ARE NOT WORTH UNDERSTANDING. Just as it would be pointless, for example, to clarify the subtle ideological distinctions between George Wallace, Bull Connor, Jim Clark, William Buckley, Billy James Hargis and George Lincoln Rockwell, so it would be fatuous to discuss the artistic differences between William Burroughs, Frank Slaughter and Henry Miller. To analyze trash is to trivialize the art of analysis and to insult oneself and one's readers.

But what with the winds of fashion blowing all kinds of fashionable dust in our eyes, how are we to know trash when we see it? Are there degrees of trashiness rising upward into literature? No. There are degrees of trashiness rising upward into trash that is mistaken for literature. *Point Counter Point* begins, " 'You won't be late?' There was anxiety in Marjorie Carling's voice, there was something like entreaty," and ends, "His mood as he walked whistling homeward was one of unmixed contentment. That night he and Beatrice pretended to be two little children and had their bath together. Two little children sitting at opposite ends of the big old-fashioned bath. And what a romp they had! The bathroom was drenched with their splashings. Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." Read it aloud. *Point Counter Point* begins trashily; it ends, the irony notwithstanding, trashily; open it pretty much anywhere at random and read aloud and you'll find yourself reading trashy prose; but this trash is regularly offered to college English classes as literature. So: How are we to know trash when we see it? And why do so many people who might be expected to know it not know it?

Some years ago Jean Paulhan said—and I agree—that the basic act of literary criticism is an immediate intuitive judgment that the book at hand is or is not worth discussing at all. But we diverge when he fails to distinguish between the intuition of a competent critic and that of any casual reader. I see that I must now define competence. All right. "Spoken criticism," says Paulhan, "—that of the street, of living rooms, of restaurants—says bluntly, 'It exists,' or 'It amounts to something,' or simply 'A fake'—and doesn't explain further. It doesn't beat

1 THE LAST GENTLEMAN, by *Walker Percy*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $5.95. OMENSETTER'S LUCK, by *William H. Gass*. New American Library. $5.95. LANDSCAPE IN CONCRETE, by *Jakov Lind*. Grove. $4.50. THE ANTI-DEATH LEAGUE, by *Kingsley Amis*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $5.95. GILES GOAT-BOY, by *John Barth*. Doubleday. $6.95. THE DIARY OF A RAPIST, by *Evan S. Connell, Jr.* Simon & Schuster. $4.95. THE HOLY LAND, by *Pär Lagerkvist*. Random House. $3.95. THE LIE, by *Alberto Moravia*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $5.95. THE CRYING OF LOT 49, by *Thomas Pynchon*. Lippincott. $3.95. DESPAIR, by *Vladimir Nabokov*. Putnam. $5.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around the bush. But the criticism of the critics beats around a hundred bushes." One critical method of avoiding the heart of the bush, which Paulhan rightly scorns, is that of Sainte-Beuve: an exclusive reliance on finding out where the poet lived when he wrote the poem, who lived on the same floor, what their friends thought of them, etc. But Sainte-Beuve had another and even simpler method, which neither Proust nor Paulhan considers: he based his judgment of new books, as he himself said, on the consensus of restaurant, café and salon opinion; he accordingly praised almost every ephemeral best-seller and ignored or condemned without exception every good book that appeared during his long career. In short, he had no confidence in his own ability to look at a text and without considering anything else judge the quality of its language, its structure, its insights, its vision. But such quality is objectively demonstrable, and a competent critic is one who can demonstrate it. We must recognize an essential difference between his intuitions and those of the innocent, the unconcerned, and the merely fashionable.

Since literature does not exist in a vacuum, we should of course consider the social bearings of the work, which are also demonstrable; but in our relativistic age we are so afraid to say that the heathen are wrong that those of us who undertake to demonstrate the quality of a piece of writing tend to confine our analysis to its language and structure; this tendency is reinforced by our lingering aestheticism, by our now general recognition that such eminences as Eliot and Leavis were bad critics when they based their judgments on non-literary considerations, by the impossibility of agreeing with dictators abroad and moral minute-men at home about the literary value of positive thinking, and by the literary worthlessness of many books whose authors have hearts of gold. (I don't mean primarily such tract-writers as Lillian Smith, Gwethalyn Graham and Harper Lee, I mean people who are taken for serious writers, such as Philip Roth and Saul Bellow.) Add to these inhibiting factors the fact that the great geniuses of modern fiction—Joyce, Proust, Kafka, Beckett—have brought about by their technical brilliance an unprecedented concern with technique, and it is perhaps understandable that we should value the dumb acrobatic virtuosity of a Robbe-Grillet above the articulate gimmick-free humanity of a Walker Percy or a Jakov Lind. The skill of a few superb contemporary technicians so dazzles us that we don't see either their emptiness or the more considerable excellences of less dazzling writers. I think this may be because so many of us who write criticism are English teachers. We read so much bad prose that when we pick up a novel by Robbe-Grillet it delights us out of our minds. I have myself been dazzled by his brilliance, and I shall always read him with pleasure; but it is a minor pleasure after all, like that of reading Lovelace and Suckling, and the kind of performance that produces it is not exclusively entitled to our regard.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Most good writers engage our interest not only by their technique but also by what they say; and any consideration of what a man says leads us unavoidably to some consideration of what he is. Proust's statement, in *Contre Sainte-Beuve,* that a book "is the product of a different *self* than the one we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices," was not true even of himself. Proust was Proust. He tortured rats and he wrote *Remembrance of Things Past.* To say that the torturer of rats was not the author of the novel is to exchange an infinitely complex personality for two or more comparatively simple ones: no bargain. That is not to solve the problem of understanding him and his work but to wish it away, and thus to cheat ourselves of an experience as stimulating as it is frustrating. Whoring after the answer, we lose the question.

It is relevant to ask who Walker Percy is and how he lives inside; for his second novel, *The Last Gentleman,* is far and away the best of the books before me and one of the best novels I have read in a long time, but in the last sixty pages or so it falls to pieces in every way—artistically, intellectually, and morally. Up to the second half of the last chapter it is the work of a highly sophisticated artist, with intellect and moral pride and courage; and then suddenly everything goes soft and the air is full of bank-lobby music. Percy is a liberal Southerner who lives in the South—a very difficult thing; I am a liberal Southerner who lives in the North—a much easier thing; and I feel an embarrassment in criticizing him; but that doesn't change the fact that his hero's ultimate decision is delusory.

His hero, Williston Bibb Barrett, is a pleasant Alabaman in his early twenties, with a very considerable gift of pleasing everybody but himself. He is tactful, "sentient," courteous, much too adaptable and agreeable; knowing that he should more often assert or at least defend the values he so languidly holds, he suffers spells of fugue and amnesia. For him, the big question we all try to answer—What am I?—is uncommonly difficult; the novel is the story of his efforts to answer it and live with the answer. Being at a loose end in New York when the novel opens, he soon meets a rich family from his part of Alabama, takes a job as tutor and companion to their invalid adolescent son, saves their empty-headed daughter from an incipient homosexual relationship, becomes engaged to marry her, and at the end of the book decides that he really will marry her, accept her father's offer of a $25,000-a-year job as personnel manager of the Confederate Chevrolet Co. (whose salesmen wear Confederate colonels' hats), raise a family, love and be loved, cultivate such talents as he has, and do his best "to promote tolerance and understanding between the races, surely the most pressing need before the country." He is of course aware of the naiveté of this formulation and all the obvious weaknesses of the position; but he makes the decision for the good existentialist reason that one should do what one can in the situation that obtains. His first act

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

after making the decision is to ease the death of the invalid by acting as interpreter between him and a rather unsentient Catholic priest; he does it with beautiful skill, protecting the integrity of the patient without offending the priest; and on the very last page he is about to persuade the patient's older brother, a failed physician, not to shoot himself through the head.

This bare outline of the plot does no justice to the book's quality, which through most of its length is very high indeed. There are several startling coincidences *ex machina,* but the prose is so uncommonly clean and good, the use of modern techniques of simultaneity is so unobtrusively skillful, the characters are so concretely visible, their speech and mannerisms are so true, and their adventures are so full of the detail of Southern life, that I wish I could believe that Williston will maintain his hard-won integrity against the heavy odds he has chosen to face. I don't believe it. I don't believe he will stay. He will have another fugue. The old Southern delusion that Negroes loved their white folks has been replaced by other delusions; but Williston, who never shared the old one, will not share the new ones. It is not in his nature. Here he is—and this is a good example of Percy's sentient prose:

> The engineer was the only white man in the entire South who did not know all there was to know about Negroes. He knew very little about them, in fact nothing. Ever since he was a child and had a nurse, he had been wary of them and they of him. Like many others, he had had a little black boy for a friend, but unlike the others, who had enjoyed perfect love and understanding with their little black friends, he had been from the beginning somewhat fuddled and uneasy. At the age of thirteen he was avoiding Negroes like a queasy middle-aged liberal.

The ambiguity of that last sentence is unfair to many of us middle-aged liberals; even so, such insights are long overdue, and a book full of them—and of such good prose—is worth more than all the tracts and more than most serious novels.

William H. Gass has a much more interesting literary gift than Percy's, but in *Omensetter's Luck* he does less with it. The contemporary novel at its best is a form of poetry—Beckett's *How It Is* is a poem whose lyric intensity is sustained throughout its length—and Gass makes a very good try. His prose is always beautifully wrought, and his ear for speech (aside from a few lapses when people say "great" instead of "big") is of the sharpest. But what we have here is less a novel than a novella and two short stories pinned loosely together. It is as if Gass inserted a few sentences about certain characters from each section into each of the other sections. The novella, "The Reverend Jethro Furber's Change of Heart," deals with a preacher who is something like Theron Ware and something like Elmer Gantry. He is a Meth-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

odist in Gilean, Ohio, who wishes he were an Episcopalian in Cleveland. Having chosen the low-church-small-town way in order to mortify his pride, this objectionable nut becomes a small-town snob and spiritual sadist. His change of heart comes only when it is safely too late—after he has destroyed Omensetter, a rather shadowy and unreal Natural Man. The chief virtue of this novel is its brilliant expressionist prose, sprinkled with such little jewels as the phrase "indecent prepositions such as in, on, up."

Jakov Lind, who looks more like Günter Grass than Günter Grass does, has written a good expressionistic novel of World War II: *Landscape in Concrete*. The dialogue is often too intelligent to be real, in essentially the same style as that of certain detectives—from Poe's Dupin to Dürrenmatt's Bärlach—who think by putting their fingertips together; but the incidents are convincing in proportion as they are fantastic. The protagonist is a German soldier who has gone mad on the Russian front and been given an honorable psychiatric discharge, but who as a devout Nazi keeps trying to get back into the army. In his desperate zeal he volunteers for the foulest criminal assignments. He is a man of unlimited, bottomless faith: there is absolutely no floor under him. And he is completely credible. So, alas, are the embarrassed Nazi officers who think of themselves fondly as anti-Nazis while making use of him in the Nazi cause. Lind is not by any means as good as Grass, but he is not a trashy writer either. *Landscape in Concrete* can be recommended as an afternoon's reading.

Kingsley Amis is a trashy writer. John Barth is a trashy writer. Evan S. Connell, Jr., is a trashy writer. Pär Lagerkvist, Nobel prize winner for literature, is a trashy writer. Alberto Moravia is a trashy writer. Thomas Pynchon is a trashy writer. The trouble with reviewing current books is that one is expected to say something about those that are being talked about, and so can't take Paulhan's advice. Let us therefore briefly consider these people, in alphabetical order.

Amis is the kind of harmless rebel whose rebellion consists of pasting the green stamps in the book upside down. In *The Anti-Death League* he writes dialogue like this between two officers on maneuvers:

> "Whence all this panic?"
>
> "It's an obvious case of group emotion and the force of the example of authority working in push-pull. The Services afford an almost uniquely favorable environment for this effect. Evidently, it's by no means confined to our own era. There's been a series on historic paraneurotic débâcles in the *Military Quarterly*, beginning with the failure of that Athenian night-operation on the heights above Syracuse."

You can find dialogue every bit as good in *Astounding Science Fiction*. The advantage of reading *The Anti-Death League* is that it includes a homosexual named Casement. *ASF* is incapable of such subtlety.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* is not so much science fiction as undergraduate humor-magazine fiction. The universe is the University; the world is the Campus; God is the Founder; Professor Moishe wrote the Old Syllabus; the Founder's Son, Enos Enoch, wrote the New Syllabus and the Seminar on the Hill; to be born is to Matriculate; the Renaissance was the Rematriculation; to die is—well, if we Pass we go through Commencement Gate and become Graduates; if we Flunk we go through the South Exit and are taken in charge by the Dean o' Flunks, sometimes called the Dunce. Etc., etc., etc., etc., etc. Here's a sample of the dialogue:

> "So listen here. You got to hear this. How did the lost Professor in the *Campus Cantos* find his way through the South Exit and around to Commencement Gate?"
>
> "He had the former director of the Poetry Workshop to show him," I replied.

Giles' progress from the West Campus goat farm to the belly of the West Campus Automatic Computer, which turns out to have been his father, takes more than 700 pages of such stuff. People say things like "Founder pass you" and "It did me a campus of good." Enough, enough. Plato and his followers regretted that the mind had a body; D. H. Lawrence and his followers regretted that the body had a mind; Rabelais regretted neither; Barth regrets both. His celebrated change of direction turns out to be no change at all. He still thinks sex is dirty, he still likes it dirty, and he is still a relativist. His values, that is to say, are still those of a tame goat. Giles regrets having forsaken the "wisdom" of his youth: "Stay inside the fence; Take of what's offered as much as you can for as long as you may; Don't exchange the certain for the possible; Boss when you're able, be bossed when you aren't, but don't forsake the herd."

Evan S. Connell, Jr.'s *The Diary of a Rapist* uses the familiar gimmick of a diary to present the familiar story of the disintegration of a lower-middle-class mind. It isn't pornography, but its appeal is that of pornography: descriptions of a seventeen-year-old girl found dead with her sweater and underclothes pulled up over her head, a fourteen-year-old girl caught posing for dirty photographs, etc. Our hero reads and thinks about such news items until he rapes somebody. Tell me news.

Lagerkvist's *The Holy Land* is one of those short and undeceptively simple allegories like *Siddhartha,* only shorter and simpler. In St. Augustine's *Confessions* the journey in search of faith is an inward journey; in *The Holy Land* it is a travelogue, with picturesque rites by simple shepherds, etc. Intellectually it is on a par with Khalil Gibran.

Alberto Moravia is still up to his old pornographic tricks. This time he mingles them with literary tricks at least as old as Gide's *The Counterfeiters.* The protagonist of *The Lie* is a journalist who wants

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to write a novel; he keeps a diary to help him remember the events of his life so he can use them in the novel; from time to time he falsifies the diary in the interest of his projected fiction, and then reproaches himself or excuses himself and corrects it. In the end he decides simply to publish the diary with a foreword and an afterword and call it a novel. It's all about his relations with his stepdaughter, whose attractions he resists because he thinks of himself as a kind of step-Oedipus or I mean step-Agamemnon to her step-Electra. Here too there is a great deal of sneaky skirt-lifting and whoring around, real and imagined. No news, except a surprisingly good brief interpretation of the Oedipus myth.

The violent goings-on in Thomas Pynchon's *V* are still going on full blast in *The Crying of Lot 49,* a work of planet fiction dealing with the planet of Southern California. A can of hair spray explodes and sprays people with lacquer, people have names like Oedipa, Hilarius and Koteks, and there is a great deal of talk like this:

"May I come in? Could we talk?"
"I'm sure you'd all like that," Hilarius said.
"I'm unarmed. You can frisk me."
"While you karate-chop me in the spine, no thank you."
"Why are you resisting every suggestion I make?"

This was doubtless the kind of reading Solomon had in mind when he said much reading was a weariness of the flesh.

Let us end this review with a book that is worth discussing. *Despair* is early Nabokov (1932 in Russian, 1937 in English), but even early Nabokov is good. The prose is for the most part rather awkward, but I attribute that to the narrator, not to the author. Hermann is a very simple soul who fancies himself a devil of complexity, and he writes accordingly. He reminds me of Larbaud's A. O. Barnabooth. I think the bad writing here is deliberately bad. "Nor am I quite certain of the exceptionality of the aforesaid phenomena," Hermann writes. He is even capable of writing "waive aside," and "conservativeness." Nabokov doesn't make mistakes except on purpose.

This leads us to believe that not only the style but everything else is a mockery and a deception, or at least an effort to deceive. Hermann has an unlimited capacity for self-deception, at least; at least he seems to. His wife commits adultery with so little effort at concealment that he all but catches her in the act, but he never seems to suspect anything. He murders and assumes the identity of a man who he thinks is his double but who actually doesn't look at all like him, and he makes the almost incredible blunder of neglecting to take the man's walking stick, which is carved with his name and the name of his native city.

In the week between the commission of the murder and his capture by the police, Hermann writes a full and circumstantial account of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his motives for murder and of the design and execution of what he thinks will be a perfect crime. But toward the end of the week the police are so close and he is so nervous that he abandons the novel form and merely keeps a diary. The last entry is dated April 1.

Nabokov often seems to be sunk in reflection like Narcissus; this novel is full of mirror effects of all kinds, always ingenious but after a while rather tiresome. This is a functional failure in an otherwise clever novel. On page 213 Hermann deplores the fact that a minor error can destroy a masterpiece; this denies his earlier denials that a minor error can affect a masterpiece at all. But perhaps a more serious error is the fact that we must take this bad prose on faith. It hardly seems worthy of Nabokov. On page 195 Hermann reads a newspaper account of his crime and writes, "I was unspeakably shocked by the tone of the thing: it was in fact so improper, so impossible in regard to me, that for a moment I even thought it might refer to a person bearing the same name as I; for such a tone is used when writing of some halfwit hacking to bits a whole family." In this novel Nabokov does justice to Hermann but not to himself, I think. He seems not yet to have found the proper Nabokov tone. *Despair* is an item in literary history.

Notes on Contributors (cont.)

CYNTHIA OZICK* lives in New Rochelle with her husband and child. Her first novel, *Trust,* has just been published by New American Library.

ANTHONY BURGESS* is the well-known English novelist and essayist. His most recent book, *Tremor of Intent,* has just been published by W. W. Norton.

SEYMOUR RUDIN,* an Associate Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, has published articles on modern drama and the dance.

VICTOR BROMBERT, Chairman of the Department of Romance Languages at Yale, has recently completed a study on Flaubert, to appear later this year (Princeton University Press).

DENIS DONOGHUE, Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, is about to return to University College, Dublin, where he will hold the new Chair in Modern English and American Literature. His most recent book is *Connoisseurs of Chaos* (Macmillan), a study of modern American poetry.

J. MITCHELL MORSE, a Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, is the author of *The Sympathetic Alien: James Joyce and Catholicism* and of the forthcoming *Wanton Heed and Giddy Cunning: Matters of Style.*

GERALD WEALES has included Shaw plays in his collections, *Eleven Plays* (W. W. Norton) and *Edwardian Plays* (Hill & Wang).

Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

A Great Provincial

BEFORE READING THESE TWO BOOKS,[1] I could have named one Portuguese writer, Camoëns, Eça de Queiroz was a dim name on bookstore shelves or in lists of neglected worthies, like Martin Nexö or the *Mabinogion*. Since the literary friends to whom I have mentioned him share my ignorance, I assume it is not just mine but American. This assumption is strengthened by the confusions about his birthdate and his name. In both dust jackets, as in some earlier encyclopedias, he was born in 1843, but in recent books of reference, he was born in 1845. On dust jackets, in journals, in encyclopedias, he is referred to variously by all three words of his last name (his first two names are not used) and by the three probable variations on it, Eça, de Queiroz, and Queiroz (Queiroz is sometimes spelled Querios or Queirós). Since by ignoring him for so long we have forfeited any right to anglicize his name as we have done with *Camões,* let us at least have the courtesy to get his name straight: the Portuguese call him Eça de Queiroz, no less, no more.

On the basis of the book of stories, I would say the obscurity in which he has been held in English is eminently justified. "The Mandarin" (1880), his best-known story, is a thin fantasy on the Faust theme, and the others are less yet. They are a notch or two below Hawthorne's stories, the sort of thing one feels obliged to speak well of (and may even benefit from) in the literature of one's own nation but not in other people's. But here also newly translated is *The Maias* (1888), which according to the encyclopedias is often taken to be his most important book. Despite my disabilities I would find it easy to review *The Maias,* except for two things: it is a great novel, seventy-eight years old. Here is a George Eliot, a Turgeniev, a Flaubert, whom we have neglected, as we neglect Manzoni, because he is neither part of an imperial literature nor one of the handful of supreme writers who transcend genre and nationality. If this book were newly written, a reviewer might have the right to be as ignorant of it and its author as I am, but Eça de Queiroz has been recognized, in the Hispanic countries at least, for three or four generations. I shall not review *The Maias* so much as suggest what it is about and what it reminds me of, and then leave you to anticipate one of those prolonged, reliable, novelistic pleasures like reading *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* or *The Red and the Black* for the first time. There is less need to pre-

[1] THE MANDARIN AND OTHER STORIES, by *Eça de Queiroz.* Ohio University Press. $4.00. THE MAIAS, by *Eça de Queiroz.* St Martin's Press. $7.95. Four other novels of his have been published in English in the past thirteen years, none of which I have read.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pare you for this book—nothing odd or difficult about it—than to persuade you to read it.

The story begins in Lisbon in 1875 and covers a decade or so. The Maias are a rich, important, Europeanized family reduced to Carlos da Maia, the protagonist, and his grandfather, Afonso. The first half of the novel portrays the attractive and talented Carlos emerging from this backwater of Western civilization into the excitements of that idealistic liberalism which he discovers in France and England, returning to Lisbon to put his medical and literary education to good effect, and soon enough beginning to submerge, consciously, into its stagnation. The idle, mostly useless people of the higher classes in which Carlos moves find their main diversion in love affairs, preferably adulterous. As a study of people stupefied by provincial bourgeois mediocrity, *The Maias* invites and benefits from comparisons with novels in a main stream of nineteenth century fiction. It is lighter, more vivid, more pleasing than *Middlemarch,* and less inclusive. It is less punishing than *Madame Bovary* and more humane, less elegantly constructed perhaps but also ampler, warmer, more personal. The closest comparison, in tone, theme, and literary merit, is to Chekhov, both his plays and many of his best stories: Eça de Queiroz' tone is rather more satiric than Chekhov's, and the liberal Russian provincials had Petersburg and Moscow to yearn for whereas the Portuguese of *The Maias* were living in the capital of their nation and culture; but these two writers are set above all others who have made provincialism their main theme by the ironic, affectionate understanding of the people they wrote about, their languor, wasted energy, pettiness, decency, self-consciousness, despairing cynicism, intelligence, inconstancy of purpose. (In the last years of his life, Eça de Queiroz made it to Paris, which no more satisfied him than Moscow satisfied Chekhov, and he too died of consumption. In the United States now from coast to coast, you can hear decent, unhappily married, cultivated people sighing, "If only I were in San Francisco," "If only I were in New York," and in New York and San Francisco the sighs still go up, "If only I were in Paris." God knows what happens to those who make it to Paris: it's hard to die of TB these days.)

As a theme for literary realism, provincialism is important and rich enough, but intrinsically less than the best: a provincial is conceived of as being not all there, incapacitated from pushing to the limit; if he kills himself or goes mad, he does so in order to avoid the spiritual limit he is headed for. For the audience, the pistol shot near the end of *Ivanov* is too much, not the suicide but the shock of the sound for which we are not and cannot be sufficiently prepared; the sound of the snapped violin string at the end of *The Cherry Orchard* is just right. Neither Hardy nor his characters were concerned about the blight of living in Wessex instead of in London, as neither Dickens nor his characters thought they were essentially the better for living

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in London instead of elsewhere in England. Balzac exploited the province-capital split marvelously, but he possessed, and endowed his characters with, so much vitality that they did not suffer from the lethargy which settled down over fictional provincials in the second half of the century; if a Balzac character yearns to go to Paris, he goes, and if he stays at home, Balzac doesn't vitiate him for it. Then came Emma and Dorothea and all those Russians. The doctor in Chekhov's "Ward No. 6" goes mad and dies without having penetrated to the heart of anything, and he is quintessentially provincial. It does not matter much that Tolstoy's "Ivan Ilich" is a provincial for he is not conceived as one; his death is a fulfillment irrelevant to capital or province. Chekhov is as adequate to his theme as Tolstoy to his, and Chekhov's theme is true of far more people than is Tolstoy's. Yet Tolstoy's is the greater story, I believe, solely because the theme itself is greater: it permitted him to push his character all the way, and he did.

In the second half of *The Maias,* Eça de Queiroz allows Carlos to become as human as he can. Without employment, a member of no social order or suborder in which he could fulfill himself as a citizen, Carlos is yet supported by pride in his family (by which is meant his grandfather since he knows little about his parents and the little he knows is mostly false) and he is man enough really to love a woman (despite her irregular past). Carlos and Maria never lose credibility as characters. Their passion never becomes demonic but remains personal, troubled, satisfying, sexual, credible; more fully than any other novelist I can think of, Eça de Queiroz grants this love-affair a full humanity, including happy, conscious, normal sexuality. And we have every reason to believe that Carlos and Maria will be able to be as well married as that world will let anyone be. (Better: they plan to go live in Italy or France.) We come to hope with fairy-tale purity that they can and will escape that torpid province for a bright land worthy of their love. But they couldn't, as their author knew.

I think that Eça de Queiroz loved Carlos and Maria too much, as Hardy loved Tess too much: both writers cheated when it came to destroying their creatures' happiness. Hardy did wonderfully by Tess on the dairy farm, but he could not do so well by destroying her and hoked things up a bit with the irony of her being captured at Stonehenge. Eça de Queiroz lets us know from the outset that Carlos' mother was wild and destructive, so that we know the family foundation to Carlos' life is less secure than he thinks; and this knowledge is consonant with the main theme of the novel. But by not letting us know until the lovers themselves discover it that they are brother and sister, he has given way and allowed us to give way to a softening romanticalness; an irony of fate in a story which has no use for such huge ironies means nothing much and turns flabby.

So, it isn't the greatest novel ever written, just one of the great ones.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GERALD WEALES

A Hand at Shaw's Curtain

IF I WERE WRITING THIS REVIEW at my own desk, in my own apartment, I might insist on the scholarly impulse that set me to reading Bernard Shaw's letters.[1] I am back in my childhood home, however, and it is difficult to maintain the pose. Every time there is an unfamiliar sound outside the house, my mother races to the window to see who or what made it. Her hand on the curtain is a metaphor for the curiosity that eats at most of us, for the fascination that lies in other people's letters. I have no patience with readers who treat novels, plays and poems as skeleton keys to their authors, for the truth of art is not designed to scratch the itch of the curious. I have no faith in diaries, for, however private, they all sound a little like Cecily's in *The Importance of Being Earnest,* "a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication." Autobiography is likely to be self-justification or self-advertisement, and biography (Capote notwithstanding) is the naked truth clothed in someone else's sensibilities. But a man's letters. . . . Whenever I open a volume of letters, I expect a figure to rise out of them, the author seen clearly for the first time.

This is a delusion, of course. The most that a collection of letters can do is to give us oblique and incomplete glimpses of a man, to remind us that he is not a perceivable figure at all, but a mosaic, and that even his complete letters would offer no more than patches. The fragments differ in substance and in texture, for the letter writer (even a personality as strong as Shaw) speaks differently to strangers than he does to his intimates. The picture is the more blurred by the fact that time and accident and even indifference have chopped at the fragments, decreeing which letters shall be saved and which discarded. The fullest and best-edited collection of letters, written by the most self-revelatory man who ever lived, would frustrate the kind of curiosity that wants finally to get to the heart of a man.

Letters inevitably dampen the expectations they excite, but that does not mean that they necessarily fail to provide revelations, specters rising from the pages that are fascinating even though we know they are not the whole story. On this level the first volume of Shaw's *Collected Letters* is remarkably successful; in fact, odd as it may seem in so scholarly a project, the collection is a kind of cliff-hanger pulling us toward the next volume. At first, this seems not to be the case. The excitement with which I opened the book was quickly stilled. I made my way, sometimes doggedly, through the early Shaw

[1] BERNARD SHAW, COLLECTED LETTERS, 1874-1897, edited by *Dan H. Laurence*. Dodd, Mead. $12.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

letters and through the notes that hoped to clarify them, taking pleasure in the prose itself, for Shaw always writes with style, and making mental notes of facts and allusions that I might some day use, but it was the same old Shaw, the one who has been so written about that he is as familiar as my face and as unconvincing a mask. The first letter is dated 1874, written by the seventeen-year-old Shaw to his sister Lucy who had already gone to London from Dublin. The last one is dated December 31, 1897, written by the forty-one-year-old Shaw to Ellen Terry, one of their celebrated exchange in which each was crutch and complainer, admirer and adviser, to the other. In between the two, an awkward and shy Irish boy (although his letters give little trace of either characteristic) arrived in London and turned himself into the presumably assured and obviously successful critic, journalist, politician on whom the last page closes. A great deal happened to Shaw and his friends during those twenty-odd years. The band of talkative young men who founded the Fabian Society became genuinely influential in English politics. Shaw made a reputation for himself, first as a music critic, and then as a drama critic; he came to be in great demand both as a speaker and as a journalist.

Still, something was not quite right. It was the picture as before and yet not quite as before. There he was, flamboyant, red-bearded, wool-wearing, vegetarian GBS, dazzling audiences and turning the heads of all the ladies but Beatrice Webb with his wit, his sense of paradox ("This is what my bourgeois critics call paradoxical," he wrote Jules Magny in 1890; "of course it is nothing but the plainest common sense"), his irreverence, his intelligence, his passion and his icy coldness. I have seen that Bernard Shaw so often—the critic, the socialist, the philanderer, the indefatigable worker—that I expected at best an occasional unfamiliar turn of the head or turn of the phrase. Instead, the book began to develop a pattern, a rhythm, a momentum which seemed about to topple that figure, to roll GBS into the dust of doubt and fatigue, as though the assurance was indeed presumed, a stylistic device by which he lived as well as wrote. "We all go as far as our styles will carry us," he wrote to William Archer in 1891. By 1897, it looked as though his style were carrying him toward a crash. By that time he had seven plays written, most of them unacted, and he had begun to speak of abandoning the theater, of settling for publication. During that year he was getting the plays ready for the press (they came out in 1898 as *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*), he was finding it more and more difficult to face up to the *Saturday Review* articles, he was writing and speaking in all directions, he was serving as vestryman in St. Pancras, he was courting and quarreling with Charlotte Payne-Townshend, who was soon to be his wife, and he was crying out to Ellen Terry—cries that were no less real for being calculated and rhetorical—for sym-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pathy and peace: ". . . my soul is shrouded in mists and my heart clogged." A tired Shaw, a despondent Shaw, an exhausted Shaw—this is something unusual. It was there to be seen before, in the previously published Shaw-Terry correspondence, where Ellen could say, "I can see you are busied to death (and a little worried I think!)" and, later, "Do nothing for nobody, or rather do that for me! *Rest,* for I know you are tired." It comes through more clearly here, however, where the force of his letters to Ellen Terry is not softened by her sometimes chiding answers and where his yelps to and at Charlotte and his business letters contribute to the picture of a heavily burdened man trying to keep his feet while being dragged downhill at a great rate. Physically, the book itself adds to this impression, for it opens with a scattering of letters, only a handful for the first ten years, and it builds to the 1890's when the number of letters grows and grows and the physical weight of them seems to settle on Shaw's shoulders. The fact that Shaw's life is familiar to us, that the crash is going to be a physical one, still another bicycle wreck, that will lead to his giving up drama criticism and single blessedness, does not erase the sense of urgency at the end of the volume. "I'm quite giddy," he wrote Charlotte at the beginning of 1897; "another fifty years of this and I shall die of it." The pleasure of the collection of letters simply as a book to read is that, true as his prediction may be, one can't help reading that line and wondering if our hero might be whistling in the dark.

Although my remarks up to this point are a kind of muted testimonial, Dan H. Laurence, the editor of the letters, would be justified in showing exasperation at them. Here am I using the letters as though they formed a kind of narrative *manqué,* an excuse for ruminations on the nature of personality, and he knows (and I know) that the gathering of the Shaw letters is one of the major projects of literary scholarship of this decade. The key word is *Collected,* not *Complete,* for, once he had tracked down as many Shaw letters as he could find, his main chore was winnowing. If all the Shaw letters were printed, Laurence says, they would fill a great many more than the twenty volumes that Shaw predicted, cautioning Edward Dodd against publication of his correspondence; Laurence's job is to get the most important, the most useful, into four volumes. There is no escaping the suspicion that some monumental items have been left out, but that is the nature of the beast, not the fault of its editor. Laurence, who has provided extensive factual notes, is faced with the usual problem of an editor about what and how much needs to be said. In general, he does a thorough job, identifying the figures that pop in and out of the letters, the articles Shaw is working on, the plays he has been to see—for Shaw's are personal letters, not literary pieces, and so use the shorthand of communication common between people who share one another's interests. I have only two complaints

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about the editing. First, elucidation is needed to understand some of the political letters; it is not enough to know who the people are, one needs to know what their quarrel was at that moment. Second, the biographical identifications are often pointless, thumbnail summations of whole careers when what one wants to know is who and what the man was at the moment the letter was written. My favorite example is from one of the letters to Ellen Terry in which Shaw says, "Send me along Master Lawrence's play if you like." The editor sensibly identifies the man and his play, but he incredibly begins his note, "Laurence Irving (1872-1914), Sir Henry's younger son, lost his life in the *Empress of Ireland* when it sank in the St. Lawrence." Unless Shaw's spelling of *Laurence* as *Lawrence* is supposed to be prescient, I can't help feeling that it's sad to hear that the great ship went down.

The mountain of letters is not being gathered simply because, like Mt. Everest, it is there. The collection will presumably serve as a tool for future Shaw scholars and critics, but what kind of a tool? Although the letters may correct a few biographical details and shift the emphasis here and there, they do not provide any major alteration in Shaw's life as we know it. Although the letters are informed, as all Shaw's writing is, by his socialism and his vitalism, they provide no statement of his beliefs that can approximate in clarity and vigor those made in his public writings. Even the simplest and shortest letter is an example of the basic Shavian style. One sometimes feels that the whole world served Shaw, as Alice did Lydia in *Cashel Byron's Profession,* as a straight man, provoking lucid explanation by voicing convention and cant. The manner changes according to the recipient of the letter and Shaw's mood of the moment; he could wheedle and coax, domineer and bluster, play the clown and play the philosopher, be patient and be outraged, but whatever the pose, at the heart of the letter was Shaw, the pedagogue, telling actresses how to act, publishers now to publish, politicians what politics was all about. Whether he was advising William Archer on how to buy a bicycle or Charles Charrington on how to cast a play, he came on as a one-man information-please, obviously in earnest but amused at the figure he cut. "*There's* a sermon for you," he ended one of the letters to Ellen Terry. "You may add, if you please," he wrote William Archer, asking him to explain English socialism to Ibsen, "that I am extremely sorry that my total ignorance of Norwegian prevented my calling on him during my stay in Munich to explain his plays to him." It is Shaw's compulsion to preach and teach that give the letters their interest and vitality, but even this is nothing new, no stylistic change from the Shaw of the reviews, the political writing, the prefaces.

The real value of the letters lies in what Shaw the pedagogue can teach us about Shaw the artist. Shaw was preoccupied with grand concepts—the elucidation of a religion—and grandiose schemes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—to change the theater for which he wrote and the society in which he lived: "My capers," he wrote Ellen Terry, "are part of a bigger design than you think." He did not, however, lose himself in abstractions, worry big, and let the details of art and politics slide. He was meticulous, concerned with the choice of a word and its look on a page; with the tone of voice and the turn of head to accompany his simplest line; with bricks and mortar as well as castles in the air. The letters are fat with this Shaw, the picker over small points, and the sharpness of his ear and eye can be seen in letter after letter. "For instance, why do you Desire to record Emphatically the deep impression made by the Production &c &c," he asked William Archer, "instead of saying 'I want, then, to record the deep impression made upon me by Hedda Gabler . . .' " The letters are not useful simply as reflections of this Shaw, but for what they say about his own works and those of other men. Whether he is examining *Cymbeline* carefully to help Ellen Terry with her Imogen or worrying over Janet Achurch's reading of one of Nora's lines in *A Doll's House,* he is contributing to an understanding of Shakespeare and Ibsen. More important, since it is Shaw the playwright who accounts for our interest in all the other Shaws, his comments on his own plays—sometimes detailed, sometimes casual—will serve the Shaw critic who wants to escape the platitudes that too often pass for Shaw criticism. "Now Morrell is really nothing but Helmer getting fair play," Shaw wrote to Charles Charrington, and the remark changes our perspective, if only temporarily, of both *Candida* and *A Doll's House.* It is the signposts and/or obstacles that Shaw sets up along the way to his own plays that make the *Collected Letters* a volume that will have to come down from the shelf again and again.

"Every man sees what he looks for, and hears what he listens for, and nothing else," Shaw once wrote to E. C. Chapman. That may be why I am happy to know that Shaw, at forty, could be as tired as he was busy, and that he, as author, worried over the details of his plays as I, as critic, would want to do.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN SIMON

Norman Brown's Body

THE PROPHETS OF THE LORD WERE STONED. In an age that had a God, or batches of rival gods, prophets were a luxury if not a downright redundancy. But in an age that has no God, and that is afraid, prophets are something to fall back on. If Aaron's rod does not perform miracles, it can at least point in some direction, however arbitrary; and if it cannot even be used as a signpost, it might still do as a crutch. Or as something to flagellate ourselves with. Let him who is without fear of the void cast the first stone. There is no God, and Norman O. Brown —or Marshall McLuhan, or Timothy Leary—is his prophet.

When Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death* appeared in 1959, it was viewed either as a serious critical interpretation of Freud or as a rather endearing piece of eccentricity. A professor of Classics writing ostensibly about "the psychoanalytical meaning of history" while actually advocating the adult's return to the infant's "polymorphous perverse" sexuality, and getting it published by a sober university press —well! But no one suspected that this book, which called for "an erotic sense of reality," would become an underground classic, its content earnestly debated by the reading minority, its catchwords astonishedly mouthed by the quoting majority, its influence considerable—to be sure, mostly on those already inclined toward, or practicing, its preachments.

Life Against Death was mainly about the inability of repression or sublimation—whether in the form of systematic thought, economic security, religion, science, or psychoanalysis—to make life full and death acceptable. The man-made soul, like money which is really feces, is only "the shadowy substitute for bodily relation to other bodies." Brown came out for "the wisdom of folly," for man's accepting his sickness, and endeavoring to "become once more . . . a body-ego . . . sensing that communication between body and body which is life." The ultimate solution, then, is "that Dionysian ego which does not negate any more," i.e., the ability to "circumvent the limitations imposed by the formal-logical law of contradiction." This entails "a willing suspension of common sense," and, finally, "a little more Eros and less strife," the increase of the former, presumably, ensuring the decrease of the latter. Or: Down with the reality-principle, up the pleasure-principle! So Eros and Thanatos will be reconciled.

The book was mostly a nosography of our emotional and spiritual shortcomings, its apparent protagonist Freud, its real hero Jakob Boehme; only in a brief concluding chapter was "the way out" of our predicament outlined. *Love's Body*,[1] Brown's new book, continues and develops that final section. But whereas the earlier volume was written

[1] LOVE'S BODY, by *Norman O. Brown*. Random House. $5.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the conventional discursive form, the new work—and this is the most remarkable thing about it—is subdivided into sixteen sections with headings like "Nature," "Person," "Boundary," "Food," "Fraction," "Resurrection," "Fulfillment," "Nothing," and each of these consists of a series of aphorisms or miniature essays that are loosely connected and that list at the bottom certain books, or passages from books, that have served as inspiration for the foregoing, or have actually been quoted therein. But there are no footnotes (perish the thought of anything so academic!), and it is often hard to tell exactly which of several authorities said what. But, presumably, in a world in which individuation is to be banished and health achieved by a universal merger, questions of authorship become nugatory and pedantic.

Just what the book is about has stumped even that usually omniscient mystagogue, the blurb-writer, who here contents himself with nothing more than listing the chapter headings. Before I venture where he has feared to tread, I had better evoke the form, which, as in all mystico-symbolic works (and, according to McLuhan, in television) *is* the message. In her otherwise extremely cogent review of *Love's Body,* Brigid Brophy[2] commits the one error of deriving its form from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus.* Even the most cursory glance into Wittgenstein, as well as the mere consideration of Brown's antirationalism, would suffice to eliminate anything as rigorously methodical from the parentage of *Love's Body.* The aphoristic-didactic style with its meandering, sometimes footstep-retracing, sometimes subterraneous and unfollowable, progression, and with its cryptically Orphic, Messianic, indeed millenarian utterances, is clearly related to the mystical and prophetic works, the sacred books of all time and all place, whose high-water mark in the modern era was *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* and whose last ripple Miss Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp."

The form, then, is a philosophy preached not by logic and consecutiveness ("the destruction of the law of contradiction is the supreme task of the higher logic") but by gnomic-gnostic snippets relying on such devices as alliteration and assonance, rhyme, punning, anaphora, refrain, repetition, inversion, ellipsis (especially the omission of articles and auxiliary verbs), sudden lapses into vernacular, word play (particularly playing around with etymology, sometimes pseudo-etymology), and, in general, pushing prose toward free verse. "Wisdom is wit; in play, not in work; in freedom, not in necessity. A vast pun, as in dreams, in the neologisms of schizophrenia, in *Finnegans Wake,* in the Old Testament prophets." And: "the original sense is nonsense," so that we must go "from disguised to patent nonsense." For "wisdom is . . . in fooling, most excellent fooling."

There, I suppose, lies the question: how excellent is Brown's fooling? Here are some samples. "This cave is grave; this womb is tomb"; "to be stuck together in eternal coitus; wedlock as deadlock"; "the potentialities are latent till made patent." "The complexities of intel-

[2] "Demolish the Ego," *New York Times Book Review,* July 24, 1966.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lectual systems; a web of deceit, a woof wove called Science. *Hyphen, hymen, hymn, hypnos.* The net or nexus. Networks of affiliation: the filial relation is not natural but artificial, threaded (*filum*)." "Mother is mold; *modder,* matter; *Mutter* is mud." (This etymology, by the way, is sheer whimsy.) "The natural order is our construction, our constriction"; "the shellfishness of selfishness"—this last, obviously, under the influence of Bacchus, whom Brown repeatedly hails as the true god. "Mars is . . . marital as well as martial"; "the altar . . . is both post erected and table spread" (do you get it? "spread" also as legs are spread, hence both phallic and vaginal). "The staff that cleaves the waters is the dead man's body, the corpse; the stiff that ejaculates the soul or the semen is the penis. Penis or corpse, stiff as stone; a perpetual erection, or monument." "The representative organ is . . . a safety deposit bank; a pocket for the peckers of the public . . . the Pecker, bearing (baring) the Person of them all."

And now one aphorism in full:

> "To reconcile body and spirit would be to recover the breath-soul which is the life-soul instead of the ghost-soul or shadow; breath-consciousness instead of brain-consciousness; body-consciousness instead of head-consciousness. The word made flesh is a living word, not a scripture but a breathing. A line that comes from the breath, from the heart by way of the breath. [I could see from the *lungs* by way of the breath.] Aphorism as utterance: a short breath, drawn in pain. Winged words, birds released from the sentence, doves of the spirit."

What does distinguish Brown's stentorian stenography, these apocalyptic apothegms (you see, it's easy: anyone can do it!) from those of other prophets is that they carry with them, as the Nile does hippopotamuses, quotations from or references to the most numerous and heterogeneous authors imaginable. The last-quoted aphorism, for example, credits Bachelard's *La Poétique de l'espace,* a note by Charles Olson on his poetry, and Robert Duncan's *Letters.* Another, a mere two-liner, gives as credentials Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique,* Dante's *Paradiso,* and Matthew XI, 12. Yet another cites Lidz, "Strindberg's Creativity and Schizophrenia," Hopkins's "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe," *Chandogya Upanishad,* V, ii, 1; V, xviii, 1, and Roheim's "Das Selbst." Everything is grist for Brown's Satanic mills, from Kerouac to Höfler's *Germanisches Sakralkönigtum,* from McLuhan to Schlossmann's *Persona und* πρόσωπον *im Recht und im Christlichen Dogma.* The polymath as miller, the molinary millenarian, the scholar-gipsy, a veritable secular Kahlil Gibran. Yet the curious thing is that Brown is against scholarship and intellectual baggage and repeatedly enjoins us to "travel light." But you cannot accuse of contradiction him who is for the transcending of contradiction. Or can you?

What underlies this farrago is fear. Fear of one's weakness, of one's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mortality, and, for all I know, fear of one's neurosis or inadequate or unorthodox sexuality. I have nothing against all of these as long as they are not converted into a philosophy or, worse, a religion. And a religion is precisely what Brown is peddling, despite his assertion that what we need is poetry, which, he says, is voluntary mystical participation. But Brown's is a religion because it preaches, hectors, deprecates, anathematizes, and commands. Even while he is against the either/or mentality, his book is a monument to it: banish reason, possession, the self—or perish!; even though he is for affirmation, he is haranguing away against the rational, the individual, the precisely defined. Poetry is non-prescriptive; Brown, like other religionists, prescribes.

And what is this religion? Variations on the old *unio mystica,* even if the gap to be bridged is not called that between God and man but between self and not-self, contemplation and violence, Oriental dematerialization of the universe and Occidental hedonism, Christ and Dionysus, Eros (sex) and Thanatos (death), word and silence. Brown continually fluctuates from one to the other, ceaselessly tries, by means of paradox or word play, to reconcile or equate them—or, by finding some *tertium quid* that will act as alkahest, to dissolve them in it, in each other.

The solution is to return to prehistory: history is "sadistic masturbatory fantasies." Politics is "a gang-bang," or "pissing in public"; the state is "the primal crime." Economics, possession are evil because they impose boundaries: even the possession of oneself is harmful delimitation. There must be no social differences; instead, "every throne a toilet seat, and every toilet seat a throne." Science and scholarship are merely "univocation," Procrustean observance of the dead letter. The word must return to the flesh.

But there is the problem: the word must return to the flesh and *also* become symbolic silence. ("A penis in every convex object and a vagina in every concave one"—a charming notion of poetic symbolism.) We have not yet begun to live, but we must look to the end. We must overthrow the reality-principle which is the prince of darkness, but we must awake and stop dreaming. If we abolish the self, there will be no more war, and "it is only as long as a distinction is made between real and imaginary murders that real murders are worth committing"—yet "freedom is violence." The way out of the maze seems to be through these four: the body, unification, madness, silence. The body makes us aware of our identity with one another, but how can we reconcile this with the "real fire [being] Contemplative Thought"? Well, Brown tells us, upwards is downwards, and vice versa. The head and the penis must become one and the same. How? Through unification with the world in polymorphous perversity, I suppose. But how can we, with the differences we have developed in our various minds and sensibilities, become one? The solution is madness, and Brown repeatedly tells us: "the insane are closer to the truth," "it is not schizophrenia but normality that is split-minded; in schizophrenia the false boundaries

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

■ The first complete presentation of the thought of James K. Feibleman

The Two-Story World

Selected Writings of James K. Feibleman

Edited and with an Introduction by Huntington Cairns

"If the broader understanding of philosophy should ever re-establish itself, James K. Feibleman might well wake up one morning to find himself America's leading philosopher," says Huntington Cairns. This much-needed book offers, for the first time, a full mosaic of Feibleman's thought, gathered from twenty-five published volumes. James K. Feibleman is now Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at Tulane University. His work elicited special attention recently in Arnold Toynbee's *Reconsiderations*, which deals at length with Feibleman's criticism of *A Study of History*.

$11.00 from your bookseller, or direct from the publisher.

HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON, INC.
383 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

A frequent contributor to the HUDSON REVIEW

ANNE SEXTON
LIVE OR DIE

A fierce and intimate collection of autobiographical poems.

"Miss Sexton records experience with a raw, nervy brilliance, dramatizing the ills of the body and mind in a language at once self-proclaiming and self-abased . . . at her best her urgency, her genuineness is overwhelming." — from a prepublication review

$4.00 cloth $1.95 paper

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY, *Publishers*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are disintegrating," "the norm is not normality but schizophrenia, the . . . crucified mind." But, alas, there are "those schizophrenics who treat words as real objects" and suffer from inability to accept "object-loss" and to settle for the symbol. And that would seem to be the final solution: symbolism, which "conveys both absence and presence," which lets in silence, the void. "The obstacle to incarnation is our horror of the void." But would embracing the void, however that is done, incarnate us? Brown would answer, Yes, if we realize that "everything is only a metaphor; there is only poetry."

So, from the fine indulgence in our bodies, we have fallen upon mere recognition of Maya, the world as illusion. But what matter if *Love's Body* is only free association, unresolved contradictions, and occasional erotic sensationalism, usually derived from Melanie Klein, probably the most rabidly doctrinaire hyper-Freudian. (I was amazed not to find her in the bibliography of *Life Against Death,* but this gap, at any rate, has been bridged: the bibliography of *Love's Body* lists twelve items by her.) With this book, Brown takes his rightful place between Marshall McLuhan and Habakkuk. For, like McLuhan, he fulfills the four requirements for our prophets: 1) to span and reconcile, however grotesquely, various disciplines to the relief of a multitude of uneasy specialists; 2) to affirm something, even if it is something negative, retrogressive, mad; 3) to justify something vulgar or sick or indefensible in us, whether it be television-addiction (McLuhan) or schizophrenia (Brown); 4) to abolish the need for discrimination, difficult choices, balancing mind and appetite, and so reduce the complex orchestration of life to the easy strumming of a monochord. Brown and McLuhan have nicely apportioned the world between them: the inward madness for the one, the outward manias for the other. After that, everything works as long as we are sufficiently browbeaten not to ask questions like 1) How do we do it—become polymorphously perverse, resexualize life, give up possessions, unite with one another—exactly how? 2) What if people cannot be added, equated, manipulated—because they are not ciphers or algebraic symbols, but people with radical, valid differences? 3) Why must we eliminate logic and accept contradiction—just because the Eichmanns *may* have been neat little functional mechanisms, does that discredit *ratio* forever?

But, happily, *Love's Body* may defeat itself even among potential proselytes. Unlike such lowbrow equivalents as Lawrence Lipton's *The Erotic Revolution,* or such middlebrow ones as Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation,* it leaves too much unsaid. "The meaning is not in the words but between the words, in the silence" runs Brown's *ars poetica,* and the publishers have provided half-inch spaces between aphorisms to facilitate the ingress of silence, or meaning. Was it not already in the Orphic Hymns that Oneiros, dream, was invoked "silently, to the silent souls/ to reveal the shape of the future"? It is precisely Dream, and his brother, Sleep, that silently alight on the reader, between the words and right in them. *Love's Body,* alas, is not Orpheus but Morpheus Descending.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poetry

POETRY CENTER, 92 ST. YM-YWHA

MEMBERSHIP: $15.00

will entitle you to membership in the Poetry Center and
free admission to ALL Poetry Center readings, lectures, special events.

READINGS

(Preliminary listing-many others to be offered)

LOUISE BOGAN	UWE JOHNSON	JON SILKIN
MELVILLE CANE	CAROLYN KIZER	I. B. SINGER
ROBERT CREELEY	WILLIAM MEREDITH	LOUIS UNTERMEYER
JAMES DICKEY	HOWARD MOSS	JOHN WIENERS
ARTHUR GREGOR	STANLEY MOSS	ELIE WIESEL
SANDRA HOCHMAN	F. D. REEVE	JAMES WRIGHT

HANS MAGNUS-ENZENSBERGER

YIDDISH-HEBREW POETRY SERIES

Jacob Glatstein, consultant

EPHRAIM AUERBACH	MALKA LEE	GABRIEL PREIL
JACOB GLATSTEIN	ALEPH KATZ	I. I. SCHWARTZ
ISRAEL EMIOT		BERISH WEINSTEIN

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

A Memorial to William Carlos Williams
with Denise Levertov and Robert Lowell, and a film

Leon Edel lecturing on The Biographer and Psychoanalysis

Leslie Fiedler lecturing on Criticism and Psychoanalysis

The above schedule is incomplete.
To receive detailed brochure, please call or write The Poetry Center.

When ordering by mail,
please enclose stamped self addressed envelope
with check payable to YMHA

Memberships also at Brentano's 586 Fifth Avenue (47 St) PL 7-8600

at the Y

1395 LEXINGTON AVENUE, NYC. Fi 8-1500

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

COLUMBIA COLUMBIA

MEASURE FOR MEASURE AS ROYAL ENTERTAINMENT

JOSEPHINE WATERS BENNETT

Rejecting the standard interpretations of *Measure for Measure* as a "dark comedy", a "problem play", an allegory on the theme of forgiveness, or a technical failure, the author claims that the play was especially chosen as a Christmastide diversion for King James I. "The consequence is a clear and handsomely argued vision of the play as pure comedy written as a graceful tribute to James I . . . it is a statement about the play that cannot be ignored and one which clarifies much that has been foolishly contentious."—*Library Journal* $6.00

SHAKESPEARE AND THE COMEDY OF FORGIVENESS

ROBERT GRAMS HUNTER

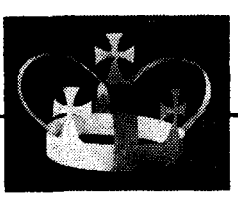
A critical assessment of six of Shakespeare's later comedies, noting how all are closely related in theme and structure, each ending with the forgiveness of an erring protagonist. "Not only has Hunter illuminated the sources of a major ethical principle in Shakespearean comedy; but . . . he has also provided a point of view from which one can understand and appreciate some of Shakespeare's most puzzling plays."—*The Minnesota Review* $6.50

COLUMBIA ESSAYS ON MODERN WRITERS

EDITED BY WILLIAM YORK TINDALL

A series of critical studies of writers in the European tradition, each written by a well-known critic. These four essays have just been added to the series: FRANZ KAFKA by Walter H. Sokel; JEAN GENET by Tom Driver; GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS by Francis Noel Lees; HERMANN HESSE by Theodore Ziolkowski. each $.65

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
2960 Broadway
New York, N. Y. 10027

COLUMBIA  COLUMBIA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED